THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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ELLERY QUEEN'S

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(see page 153)

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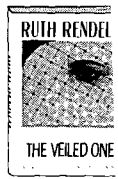

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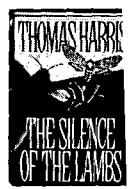

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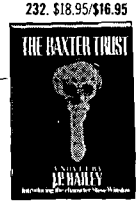

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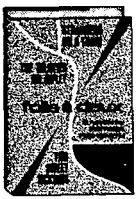

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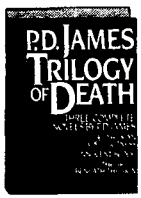

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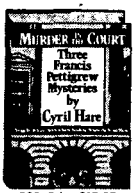

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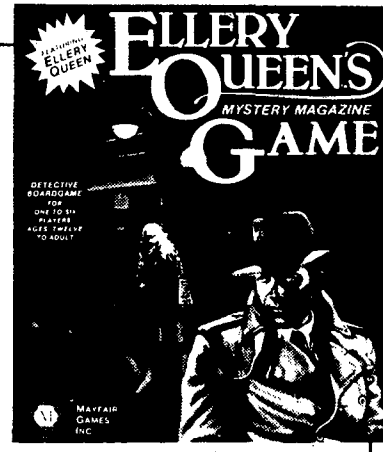

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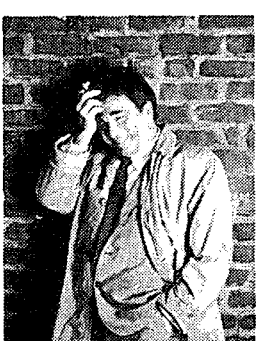

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a *NEW* Ben Snow story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Jumbo, the largest elephant in the world, had come from Africa originally, Scotty told Ben, but he'd been at the London Zoological Gardens for seventeen years.

"How did Barnum get him over here?" Ben asked.

"That's a long story I'll tell you someday," Scotty said. "Meanwhile, watch your step, Ben."

"You mean with Colonel Jasper?"

"I don't know exactly what I mean. He wouldn't tell you this, but the man you're replacing was murdered two days ago . . . "

THE CIRCUS MURDERS

by EDWARD D. HOCH

The late summer of 1885 was a dangerous time for Ben Snow. Even though Billy the Kid had been dead for four years, the legend persisted that he had somehow survived the shooting by Sheriff Pat Garrett at the old Maxwell ranch in the New Mexico Territory. Ben's boyish face and lightning speed with a gun had haunted him in those early days, and more than once he'd been tagged as the dead Billy Bonney.

By September of '85, still only twenty-six years old, Ben had ridden even farther to the Northeast, trying to put as much space as possible between himself and New Mexico. Finally, after boarding his new horse Oats at a stable west of Chicago, he took the train east to Detroit and crossed over into Canada at Windsor, Ontario. He figured on getting work there for the winter, and then heading back West in the spring, when the interest in Billy the Kid might have died down.

But jobs weren't that easy to find for someone like Ben. There was

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no need for a gunfighter or cowhand in Ontario. "No cattle grazing around here," one employer told him, "except for a few herd of dairy cows."

"There must be something I can do."

The man eyed him with a smirk. "How about a herd of elephants? Ever round up any of them?"

"Elephants?" Ben assumed the man was joking.

"The Barnum, Bailey & Hutchinson Circus is playing over in Chatham, about forty miles east of here. They travel with thirty-one elephants and always need extra handlers."

Ben was just young enough to be neither frightened nor offended by the suggestion. He thanked the man politely and set off for Chatham. His weapons and gunbelt were stowed safely away in the bottom of his carpetbag and he might have been any young man traveling in search of a job.

The train to Chatham deposited him not far from where the circus was encamped for its brief stay. The railroad cars with their Barnum, Bailey & Hutchinson signs were off on a siding and the main tent was already in place. Ben strode through the sawdust to the ticket booth where a young woman with dark hair was preparing to open for business.

"Pardon me, Miss. Who would I see about a job?"

She eyed him up and down. "You an American? We'll be going back across the border next week."

"I'm an American."

"All right—see my father, Colonel Jasper." She grinned a little. "Tell him Anna sent you. His office is in that railroad car."

"Thanks a lot."

Ben followed her direction and found himself in a plush, gaslit office, facing a stocky man with white muttonchop whiskers who listened to him and then chuckled. "So my daughter told you to see me. She mustn't think much of you. I've got no openings."

"Back in Windsor they told me you could always use an elephant handler."

Colonel Jasper snorted. "A boy like you?"

"I'm twenty-six and I've done my share of range work. I've handled steers that were probably as big as your elephants, sir."

The colonel stood up, laughing. "You think so? Follow me, son."

He led the way out the back to one of the railway cars fitted out to carry animals. A few medium-sized elephants were penned up out

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front, their ankles chained to heavy spikes. Colonel Jasper ignored them and led Ben around the back of the car, where Ben came face to face with the largest creature he'd ever seen.

It was an elephant, all right, but taller than anything he'd imagined. "It's twice as tall as I am!" he exclaimed.

"Almost. This is Jumbo, star of the show and the largest elephant in the world. We measure him at around eleven feet. Think you could handle him, son?"

"Maybe," Ben answered uncertainly.

Jasper laughed. "Don't worry, you won't have to. Jumbo has his own handler and keeper. Come here, Scotty."

A middle-aged man with dark eyes and a brown moustache hopped down from a bale of hay on which he'd been seated. For his age and weight, he moved with remarkable agility. "Yes sir, Colonel."

"Mr. Scott, this is Ben Snow. He wants a job handling the elephants. Think we can use him?"

The man the colonel called Scotty eyed Ben as the great elephant brushed the ground with its trunk in a kind of sweeping motion. "Have you had any experience with animals, Ben?"

"I've done ranch work out West with horses and cattle."

"A cowboy!"

"Sometimes," Ben admitted.

Colonel Jasper seemed satisfied. He quickly described Ben's wages and duties. "My daughter Anna handles the payroll. See her if you've got any questions."

Ben nodded. "Thank you, sir."

"Put him to work, Scotty."

When they were alone with the elephants, Scotty explained a bit about the job. "You don't have to worry about Jumbo here. I handle him personally. And Felix brings water for all the elephants. But the others need to be walked around, given a little exercise. Here, you can start with Tom Thumb. He's the smallest of them."

Ben was led over to meet Tom Thumb, a dwarf elephant who, Scotty explained, was something of a clown in the circus. "We usually bring him on with Jumbo, because there's such a difference between them."

As Ben played with the little elephant, he said, "Mr. Barnum's name's famous all over the country. Does he travel with you?"

Scotty shook his head. "Barnum spends most of his time back in New York arranging bookings and handling business matters. Mr.

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Hutchinson is with us, but you're not likely to meet him. He leaves the ground work to his managers, like Colonel Jasper."

Scotty took Ben on a tour of the main tent, where customers were beginning to fill the seats for the afternoon performance. "It's a big place," Ben said. He'd never seen an enclosed space quite this large before.

"Holds twenty thousand people and we fill it twice a day, for the afternoon and evening performances. Three of the four rings are in constant use, with different acts being performed simultaneously."

Ben was suddenly aware that Scotty didn't talk like the other Americans he knew. His experience with accents was limited but he took a good guess. "Are you English, Scotty?"

"Sure am. I was Jumbo's favorite keeper at the London Zoological Gardens—which is where he came from. He came from Africa originally, by way of Paris, but he was in London for seventeen years."

"How did Barnum get him over here?"

"That's a long story I'll tell you someday. Meanwhile, watch your step, Ben."

"You mean with Colonel Jasper?"

"I don't know exactly what I mean. He wouldn't tell you this, but the man you're replacing was murdered two days ago. Nobody knows who did it."

After that, Ben wasn't satisfied until he had the entire story, which Scotty told him with some reluctance.

The man's name had been Rusty Gallagher and, like Ben, he'd been something of a drifter. He'd been on the job since June, traveling across the northern states with the circus, tending to the elephants with Scotty and Felix. Two nights before, in Windsor, he'd been found dead next to Jumbo's enclosure, his skull crushed as if by a blow or a fall. Mr. Hutchinson and Colonel Jasper had hushed the matter up, using a few well placed bribes to convince local police that the death was accidental. Otherwise, as Scotty explained it, the entire circus could have been stuck in Windsor awaiting the outcome of an inquest. Jumbo was too big an attraction to have this death hanging over him.

"You mean they think Jumbo killed him?" Ben said.

"Some folks do," Scotty admitted. "But not me. He's the gentlest animal I've ever known—perfect around children. They climb all over his back and it never bothers him."

"Maybe this Gallagher fellow was tormenting him."

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"No. Whoever killed him, it wasn't Jumbo," Scotty said.

It was one of Scotty's duties to parade Tom Thumb and Jumbo into the main tent for their initial appearance together, and as the afternoon performance got under way he went off to prepare the elephants.

The elephants' water boy, Felix Knight, was hardly a boy—he must have been close to fifty. He walked with a limp, which he told Ben he'd gotten fighting for the North at the Second Battle of Bull Run. "We lost that time, too," he said with resignation. "I was out of the war for good before the tide turned and the Union started winning."

"Do you carry water for all these elephants?" Ben asked.

"Yes. It's not so bad this time of year. In the summer when it's hot and they're thirsty, I get some of the town kids to help out. Pay 'em with passes to the circus."

"Are the bosses here good to work for?"

Felix shrugged, emptying his pails of water into Jumbo's trough as he spoke. "They're as good as any. The best of the lot is the colonel's daughter. She makes a man feel young again."

She did indeed, and when she stopped Ben for payroll information later that afternoon he felt that he'd known her for years. She brushed the dark hair back from her eyes and said, "You can go watch the performance, you know. It'll give you an idea of what everyone does here."

She must have been about Ben's own age, perhaps a few years younger, but traveling with the circus had given her a worldliness that surprised him. Until then his experience with women had been limited to ranchers' daughters and the prostitutes you encountered in any frontier town. "I might do that, Miss Jasper," he said.

"I'm just Anna around here," she told him.

"It must be exciting, traveling around like you do, seeing a different town every few days."

"You get tired of it," she said. "The animals keep me interested, though. I love the animals."

"Is it true that Jumbo killed a man the other day?"

Her eyes flashed. "No, that's not true! Jumbo is the kindest, gentlest elephant I've ever known. The children love him, just as they loved him back at the London zoo."

"If they loved him so much, why was he sold to Barnum?"

"That needn't concern you," Anna told him.

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Ben decided to change the subject. "Was your father a colonel in the war?"

"He was on President Lincoln's personal staff in Washington," she told him with a touch of pride, recovering her good spirits. "I was only a baby at the time, of course, but my mother used to tell me about it."

"Does she travel with the show, too?"

"No, she's back home in Pennsylvania."

They'd strolled over to a flap in the main tent, which suddenly parted to reveal two identical young men in spangled tights running out to the sound of applause. Anna grabbed them both by the arm. "Wait a minute, I want you to meet Ben Snow. He's going to be helping Scotty and Felix with the elephants. Ben, these are the Twinkle Twins—Tommy and Terry—the best tumblers in the business."

"Glad to meet you," Tommy said with a strong southern accent. "How you gettin' on with Jumbo?"

"Fine so far," Ben told him. He watched them head for one of the railway cars. "Are their names *really* Twinkle?"

Anna laughed. "No, of course not. My father discovered them down in Alabama last year. Wait till you see them perform."

Through the flap, Ben saw a parade of clowns and jugglers, acrobats and bareback riders. "Where do you find all these people?" he marveled.

"Some of the best performers are European. Our star bareback rider is Bavarian, and we have a Tattooed Man from Greece."

Scotty appeared behind them and tapped Ben on the shoulder. "Let's go, Ben. The elephants are on next."

Ben soon discovered that although the handlers carried long whips it was rarely necessary to use them in putting the elephants through their paces. "They're mostly for loading them onto the train," Scotty explained, showing him how to handle the whip. "These elephants are born performers, so long as you give them plenty of food and water and don't do anything to torment them."

"Do you think that's what happened to Rusty Gallagher? Was he tormenting Jumbo?"

"I told you no. And Jumbo didn't kill him."

"Who were Rusty's friends here?" Ben persisted.

"I don't know. He made overtures to Anna, but just about everyone does that until they discover she's unavailable." Ben wondered if

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that was for his benefit. "I suppose he was friendly with the Twinkle Twins. They came from the same hometown."

That night, at the show's evening performance, Scotty and Ben led Jumbo and some of the other elephants in the grand entry and promenade, during which most of the troupe marched three times around the main tent, between the banked-earth rings and the spectators' seats, while the band played a rousing introduction. Mr. Hutchinson led the promenade, mounted astride a prancing white horse, and Ben doubted that even Barnum himself could have been a more imposing figure.

Later, as he helped Scotty wash down Jumbo, Ben reminded him, "You were going to tell me how Jumbo got here from the London zoo. Anna bristled a little when I asked her why the zoo sold him to Barnum."

"It's a sad story in a way." Scotty scrubbed the elephant's back with a long-handled brush. "Everyone in London loved Jumbo. He was the largest elephant in the world and still is, far as I know, but he was so gentle with children they could feed him a biscuit or a lump of sugar and he took it with the delicacy of an English matron at teatime. But at the London zoo he displayed an uncertain temper when he was by himself in the elephant house. Some of the directors were afraid there might be a latent streak of insanity that might one day surface—they were uneasy about trusting small children within reach of his ponderous trunk, even though he was always gentle around them. When the offer came from Barnum, they decided to accept it and avoid the possibility of a future tragedy."

"How much did Barnum pay?" Ben asked.

"Two thousand pounds. That's around ten thousand dollars. It cost Barnum twice that to have him shipped to America. The iron-bound box took up two decks of the *Assyrian Monarch,* and since the ship was forbidden to carry passengers on those decks Barnum had to reimburse the company for its lost business on the voyage. But the worst part came when I started to lead Jumbo from the zoo down to the ship. As soon as he felt the unfamiliar ground underfoot, he refused to go any farther. We'd already had a bad scene the previous day when they tried to chain him. The press made so much of it it intensified the indignation of the public, who were already displeased about the sale to Barnum. Queen Victoria intervened and urged that Jumbo be kept at the zoo regardless of the contract. It took a five-week lawsuit to settle the affair. Barnum finally won the elephant and hired me to come with him to America. I succeeded in

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luring Jumbo on board the ship with his favorite buns and a little beer."

"Beer!"

Scotty chuckled at Ben's reaction. "His daily ration in London was two hundred pounds of hay, five pails of water, and a quart of whiskey. I thought I did very well cutting him back to beer. It was a rough two-week crossing that April, but he came through it fine. He was taken immediately to Madison Square Garden in New York, where the circus was playing. The crowds he attracted more than paid for the cost of the journey."

"He's never been back to London since?"

"No. Barnum promised to take him back someday, but I believe that was only to mollify the British public."

"He's shown no sign of his bad temper since being with the circus?"

Scotty looked at Ben coolly. "Nothing that would endanger a human being, if that's what you mean."

That night after the line of horses with their plumes and spangles and tasseled blankets had made one last circle of the four rings, it was time to pack up for the next stop on the tour.

"St. Thomas," Anna told Ben when he asked. "It's about sixty miles farther along, on the way to a stop in London, Ontario."

Striking the tents, securing the animals, and loading the equipment into the freight cars took more time than Ben had expected. Working in near darkness was new and difficult for him, and even though the loading of the animals had begun while the performance was still under way, there was still much to be done. Jumbo and Tom Thumb took part in the finale, so they were the last of the elephants to be loaded on board. Scotty had Jumbo under control and Ben was urging Tom Thumb forward when the midget elephant ran into one of the burly roustabouts, knocking him to the ground. The sight of it was so funny that Ben made matters worse by laughing.

The roustabout was on his feet at once, fists clenched. "What's so funny, cowboy?"

"I just—"

The worker swung at Ben, catching him with a right to the jaw. He went backward into the sawdust, but was on his feet at once, keeping his head low as he charged the roustabout.

"Stop that, you two!" Scotty came running as Ben butted the man

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and went down on top of him. Ben was pulling back his fist when Scotty grabbed both his arms and yanked him off the other man.

"That's Kirt Flagon," Scotty warned under his breath. "He'd as soon kill you as look at you."

"I owe him one," Ben protested, trying to shake off Scotty's restraining hands.

"Yeah, and if you pay it off he'll be waiting for you behind the train some night with a sharpened tent peg."

Flagon gave Ben a long, mean look and then allowed himself to be led away by his friends.

"Most circuses still travel by wagon," Scotty explained as their train pulled into the St. Thomas yards before dawn. "But Barnum says trains are the way to go. We can move by night and everyone gets at least a few hours' sleep. And we can cover distances faster, too. With wagons we'd never be able to play as many small one-night performances as we do. There's always something breaking down. Not to mention the problem of getting thirty-one elephants into wagons. Most of them would end up walking, and that would add to the delay."

"Circuses are pretty rare where I come from," Ben admitted. "We get some medicine shows and an occasional trained-bear act, but that's about all."

Scotty climbed out of the bunk and Ben heard his bare feet hit the floor. "Let's get going. We can move the elephants out before daybreak."

Once the ramp was in place for them, Ben found that the elephants were only too anxious to leave the boxcars for firm ground. He was leading the first batch to their new enclosures when one of the Twinkle Twins hurried by. "Have you seen my brother?" he asked Ben.

"No. Which one are you?"

"Tommy—I'm looking for Terry." He hurried on, looking anxious.

The sky was beginning to glow on the eastern horizon, and already small boys from the town were running up to watch the circus unloading. They gave a cheer when Scotty led Jumbo off his special car and he had to warn them to keep out of the way. The great elephant flapped its ears and trumpeted a greeting, which brought another cheer.

"Look alive here," Colonel Jasper shouted to no one in particular, hurrying along the track. "We've got work to do!"

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"Colonel," Scotty called to him, "what's that other track for? You know it's dangerous to lead the animals across track."

"They tell me it's an unused spur line. There won't be any trains along it."

Scotty seemed satisfied and continued with the unloading. Ben was especially careful with Tom Thumb, remembering the previous night's trouble. But there was no sign of Kirt Flagon near the train and Ben only spotted him later driving pegs for the main tent. By that time he'd encountered Tommy Twinkle again. "Did you find your brother?" he asked him.

"Yes." Tommy gave Ben a toothy grin. "He was with one of the girls."

When all the elephants were in their enclosures, Ben helped Felix unload hay that had been purchased in town to feed the animals. "They'll be thirsty after this load," Ben said, heaving a bail into Jumbo's pen.

"Lake Erie's just a few miles away if we need it," Felix replied with a laugh.

Later, as the afternoon performance got under way, Ben helped Scotty and Felix with the elephants. After his initial appearance, which never failed to evoke cheers and applause, Jumbo was brought back to his pen for feeding and watering. Felix went off to fetch the water buckets while Scotty supervised Ben in getting some of the other elephants ready. The lions and tigers seemed unusually restless in their nearby cages and Ben cast a wary eye in their direction. "Are they always this noisy?"

Scotty shrugged. "Every town is different. The odors are different. It takes them a while to settle down."

One of the clowns ran up to tell Scotty the tumblers weren't in their ring. Scotty cursed. "Stay here and look after Jumbo, Ben, while I hunt up Colonel Jasper. We may have to bring the elephants on earlier than usual."

As soon as Scotty had disappeared from sight, Ben heard Jumbo making a terrible commotion on the other side of the enclosure. Deciding that the other elephants could be left for a moment in their ankle chains, he ran around to see what the trouble was.

Lying inside Jumbo's pen, virtually under the feet of the great elephant, was the bloodied body, in his spangled costume, of one of the Twinkle Twins.

Word of the death spread like wildfire among the circus people,

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though they did their best to keep the news from reaching the spectators at the afternoon performance. No mention was made of the Twinkle Twins, and even Jumbo's absence from the finale went virtually unnoticed. When one family asked Colonel Jasper about it on the way out, he merely replied that their big attraction was a bit under the weather.

The local police had been summoned, of course, and they'd ordered that Jumbo remain chained until their investigation was complete. As he'd done following the previous death, Scotty argued vigorously in the elephant's defense and Colonel Jasper joined in. At one point Mr. Hutchinson appeared, looking distraught. "What's going on here, Colonel? Two killings within a week and no explanation? Who was killed this time?"

"One of the twin tumblers. We're not sure which one because we haven't been able to locate the other twin."

Hutchinson was obviously frustrated. "I don't want to telegraph Mr. Barnum about this if I don't have to."

"Where is he?" Jasper asked.

"At the Murray Hill Hotel in New York City."

"Let's wait until we know the facts," the colonel suggested. Ben was standing on one side with Felix Knight and he called them both over. "What do you know about it?" he asked them.

"I was out getting water for Jumbo," Felix told him. "I'd just filled the buckets when I heard the commotion. I dropped them and came running when Ben called for help."

Colonel Jasper shook his head sadly. "Is there any possible chance Jumbo could have done it?"

"No, sir!" Scotty insisted. "I'd stake my life on it. He never harmed a living being, and he hasn't changed now!"

"There was some concern at your zoo in London at the time he was sold. He was said to have a bad temper."

"Only in the elephant house. Perhaps he didn't like it there for one reason or another. He's been with the circus here for nearly three and a half years without anything like this happening."

Colonel Jasper turned back to Ben. "Couldn't you see anything from where you stood?"

"No, sir. I was at the other end of the elephant enclosure. You know we hang sheets of canvas between the pens to help keep the animals calm."

"What about this missing twin? Have you any idea where he could be?"

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Ben shook his head. "But they were ready to go on, sir, in their spangled tights. The missing twin couldn't have gone far in that costume."

"Perhaps not," said Hutchinson. "Colonel, I want you to organize search parties at once. We have three hours until the evening performance and we've got to use every minute of it."

Ben found an empty bucket and brought Jumbo some water, but the big elephant wasn't thirsty. Instead, he stood curling and uncurling his trunk, occasionally trumpeting his displeasure at all the activity around him. Watching the searchers setting off to find the missing twin, Ben had his own idea of where the man might be.

Anna Jasper was at the box-office counter totaling the afternoon's receipts. "Did you hear what happened?" he asked.

"Isn't it terrible? Do they know which twin it is yet?"

"They don't, but I think I might."

She looked blank. "How?"

"I saw Tommy earlier," he explained. "He said he was looking for Terry. Then later he told me he'd found Terry with a girl. I think Tommy might be dead and Terry might be hiding with the girl."

Anna was dubious. "That's not much to go on."

"What girl has Terry been seeing, do you know?"

She hesitated and then said, "Sandra. She's one of the trapeze artists."

"Where does she sleep?"

"On the train. I can show you." She scooped up the money and stuffed it into a leather pouch. "Come on."

Sandra was a pretty redhead who was changing into her street clothes when Anna knocked at the wall by her berth and announced herself. Ben hovered behind, waiting to see how the conversation would go. "We're looking for Terry," Anna told her. "His brother's been killed."

"I heard. What makes you think Terry would be here?"

"Just a hunch," Ben said, moving in. He pushed Anna gently aside and lunged for the upper berth, where he'd seen something move among the blankets. It was one of the twins in his spangled costume.

"No!" he shouted. "Leave me alone! I don't want to die!"

Ben had to drag him out of the berth down onto the floor. "You're not going to die."

"He'll kill me next, I know he will!"

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"Who? Jumbo?"

"Jumbo didn't kill anybody."

"Then tell us who did."

He was trembling with fright. "No, no, I can't!"

"Come along, then. They need you to identify your brother. I won't let anyone hurt you."

The redhead told Anna, "He's been like this since he came here an hour ago. He said Tommy'd just been killed and he'd be next. He insisted I hide him."

But Terry would say nothing more. He allowed himself to be returned to the elephant area outside the main tent and he identified the body of his brother in a soft, almost inaudible voice, then he left again with Sandra. He seemed to trust no one else near him, including Anna.

The local authorities were unwilling to accept Terry's word that his brother had been murdered. But Ben spotted something the others had missed. There was a tent peg half buried in the sawdust, and when he picked it up he saw bloodstains on the broad end. "Does this satisfy you?" he asked, holding it up. "Or do you think Jumbo swung this with his trunk?"

The local sheriff impounded it as evidence, and it strengthened Terry's words. "I'm convinced," Mr. Hutchinson announced. "Jumbo will perform tonight. I don't believe he's harmed anyone."

Scotty grinned and patted the elephant's trunk.

During the break between shows, Anna Jasper allowed Ben to escort her into the town of St. Thomas for something to eat. "Usually I don't mind eating with the others," she told him, "but tonight I just wanted to get away. There's something going on that frightens me."

"I think it's frightening everyone," Ben said. "Especially Terry. Did you notice how he even seemed afraid of you after we found him?"

"I think you're right," she agreed, avoiding his eyes.

"How could that be, when he indicated the killer was a man?"

She was silent for a time, picking at her food. Finally she forced herself to answer. "He thinks my father might be involved."

"The colonel? That's crazy."

She said no more at first, and then she added only, "Ben, you and I are too young to remember the war, and the depth of the hatred it caused on both sides . . ."

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There was no way of knowing what rumors had spread among the townsfolk about the latest killing and Jumbo's possible involvement, but there was a sellout crowd for that evening's performance. Ben was in charge of Tom Thumb during the early part of the show and watched with pleasure as the dwarf elephant cavorted with the clowns.

The circus was due in London, Ontario, the following day, so it was important that Ben begin loading some of the elephants before the performance ended. Scotty had said he'd bring Jumbo and Tom Thumb after the finale and Ben was waiting for them when he encountered the roustabout, Kirt Flagon.

"Well, if it isn't the cowboy again," Flagon said, feigning surprise. He carried a tent peg in one hand, the narrow end sharpened to a daggerlike point.

"Haven't we had enough violence here for one day?" Ben asked, wishing he'd unpacked his six-shooter.

"This'll be the last of it," Flagon assured him, lunging forward.

Ben sidestepped and hit the man on the back of the neck as he went by. Flagon tottered but didn't fall. In an instant they were locked together, grappling for the sharpened tent peg.

Suddenly the shrill blast of a train whistle cut through the night. Ben looked up to see a locomotive and several cars rounding a bend on the track that was said to be unused. He broke free of Flagon's grasp and shouted a warning at the figures on the track. Then the light of the locomotive straightened and targeted them with its beam, and Ben saw to his horror that Scotty had Jumbo and Tom Thumb headed back to their cars, directly in the path of the oncoming train.

Hemmed in by the circus train on one side and a steep ditch on the other, Scotty had nowhere to go but forward. He urged the two elephants on, trying to outrun the train as the warning whistle sounded again. Ben could see that the engineer had applied the brakes, but the locomotive was on a downgrade and the distance was too short. The train hit Tom Thumb a glancing blow, knocking the dwarf elephant into the ditch, and then plowed into Jumbo's hind legs.

The huge elephant gave a terrible roar that Ben would remember for the rest of his life, then went down as the locomotive jumped the track and passed over him.

It took Jumbo fifteen minutes to die, while crews labored to remove

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him from under the train. He groaned only once before life left him, and even then Scotty stayed with him, sobbing against the body of the great elephant.

While veterinary surgeons labored over Tom Thumb, the others headed back to the tent. The accident had occurred around nine-thirty and by ten o'clock an informal group had gathered by Jumbo's empty pen to listen to Mr. Hutchinson. "This is a great tragedy for us all," he said. "I've already telegraphed Mr. Barnum in New York. We'll spend the night here and leave for London in the morning. There are audiences waiting there and the show will have to go on without Jumbo."

"What about the killings?" Anna asked.

Mr. Hutchinson looked somber. "If Jumbo was responsible—"

"No," Ben said, stepping forward. "We owe that noble beast this much, at least—to clear his name of any hint of scandal. Jumbo never killed anyone. I showed you that bloody tent peg this afternoon."

"He's right," Terry Twinkle said. Ben hadn't noticed him, standing to one side in his regular clothes. "My brother was killed for the same reason Rusty Gallagher was—because we're different from the rest of you. We talk different. We're from the South. And Colonel Jasper hated us for that."

The colonel took a step forward but his daughter held him back. "My father never harmed anyone!" she shouted at Terry. "Not even in the war!"

"Then why else were they killed?"

It was time for Ben to speak again. "Quiet down, everyone. I've only been with you for two days, but there are a few things about these killings that are clear to me. First, Jumbo is innocent. Second, and here I agree with Terry, the only thing the victims seem to have had in common was that they were both from the same Alabama town. They could have been killed because they were southerners. But if that's the case, there's a far more likely suspect among you than Colonel Jasper, who fought the entire war behind a desk in Washington. There's one man here who was wounded at Bull Run, who never took part in the North's great victories, who may have nurtured a hatred of the South that he was finally unable to suppress."

It was Colonel Jasper who gave a name to the accusation. "You're talking about Felix Knight."

"Exactly."

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Felix had been lingering near the edge of the group. "What are you talking about?" he said.

"At first I had my suspicions of Kirt Flagon, the roustabout," Ben said. "He's a violent man who picks fights easily, and a tent peg seems to be his favorite weapon. But I learned a little while ago that he prefers the narrow end, sharpened to a point, rather than the blunt end. And then I remembered something about Felix. He'd gone to get water for Jumbo shortly before Tommy's murder. He would have arrived back with the pails just about the time the killing took place."

"Except that I didn't," Felix insisted. "I told you I was still filling the buckets when I heard the commotion."

Ben nodded. "I know what you said, but it wasn't true. After we found the body, I fetched a pail of water for Jumbo myself, but he wasn't thirsty. How could that be, I wondered, when he consumed five buckets a day and hadn't had any since the bale of hay that would certainly have made him thirsty? Since you were the only one who brought water to Jumbo, there was just one possible explanation. You lied. You did give Jumbo water. And that places you at the scene of the murder just when it happened. You had no reason to lie about it unless you killed Tommy."

This time Felix had a knife, but he didn't leap at Ben. He went instead for Terry. "Now I'll finish the job!" he cried, and he almost did before they managed to drag him off.

It was Mr. Hutchinson who brought them the only good news of the night. The veterinary surgeons reported that Tom Thumb's left hind leg was broken but otherwise he was all right. The leg was being set and he would be able to make the trip to London, Ontario, with the others. Even Scotty managed a weak smile at the news.

Ben knew he wouldn't remain long with the circus. He needed the open spaces and freedom of the West. He hoped for one more chance at Kirt Flagon before he departed, but that was not to be. The roustabout was jailed by the local police in London after starting a barroom brawl and Ben never saw him again.

"Q"

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College education, military service, manhood, marriage, and employment had all combined to move Stan Slade into the city. Divorce, alimony, and the death of his aged Uncle Tim had moved him back to the old family home almost a mile from the depot—a distance he always walked, except when the vilest weather obliged him to use a cab . . .

DOWN BY THE DEPOT

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

Bob Mills told me this story.

He met someone, let us call him Stanley Slade, as they both were about to belly up to the refreshment counter of a certain batcave. Although Bob didn't know Stan very well, he knew him well enough to ask, "How come your face is, ahm, kind of bunged up? Did you fall?"

Stan repeated the last word in a peculiar tone. Then he said, "Yeah—from grace."

"How's that, Stan?"

Stan for a second or so did not answer. Then he said, "Are you buying the bourbon?"

"Sure."

"Then I'll tell you. As soon as it comes." When it came, Stan drank it in a gulp, rather unlike his usual placid sipping manner, and yet, despite what he'd said, he remained silent. A second signal given, a second drink having appeared, Stan tossed it down as quickly as the first. And after a bit more silence, he began to talk—slowly, and with interruptions, and with many sighs and broken breaths.

Although the commuter feeder-line train Stanley Slade rode had been allowed to decay almost to a streak of rust by a venal state railroad board, several trains a day still ran—or rattled—some by day, some by night. The handwriting was on the wall for the midnight train, yet it, too, still plied its tired, sullen way between the bigger station, where Stan changed for the city train, and the two

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small depots beyond the one where he got on in the morning and got off in the evening.

In Stan's boyhood, there had been great plans for the region around the depot, some way from the village proper. What remained of the forest primeval had been lumbered off, the few old houses and the one old shack store torn down, and the view improved by a billboard prophesying development. The Depression and changing population patterns had put paid to these plans, and the ravaged area had tangled up into second-growth thicket. College education, military service, manhood, marriage, and employment had all combined to move Stan Slade into the city. Divorce, alimony, and the death of his aged Uncle Tim had moved him back to the old family home almost a mile from the depot—a distance he always walked, except when the vilest weather obliged him to use a cab.

By now there was only one, and it no longer met the late-night trains.

If Stan took the early train after work, he played a game of cards—on a board supplied by a veteran conductor who kept the change—with three other men he never saw anywhere else and likely wouldn't have recognized if he had—probably vice versa, too, as Stanley was of no outstanding appearance. He very seldom went to the village any more, and was very seldom recognized, even dimly, when he did.

There was no longer a Mrs. Slade to be vexed if Stan were "delayed at the office," but this evening he *had* been delayed at the office. He took the late (though not the late, late) train, he had had no game of cards, he had not even thought to get a newspaper. The train was dirty, the lights were dim, and he fell into a rather listless state, devoid even of revery.

The train drew away from the stop almost as soon as he had left it, lumbered away under the bridge at the far side of the depot, and, with a despondent hoot, was gone. Stanley, without even raising his eyes, began to tread the all too familiar sidewalk, which had for decades been fulfilling President Hoover's prophecy about the grass.

Suddenly he felt a blow on his head. An arm encircled his throat and, speechless, shocked, and dazed, he was dragged off into the thickets that crowded close upon the cracked and riven pavement.

He was aware of a harsh and heavy breath laboring close to his left ear. A shove sent him crashing to the ground, then came another punishing blow as he raised his head. Resisting no longer, in dull

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and painful astonishment, he was aware of his clothes being stripped from his body.

Feet crashed off through the underbrush and he was left alone. His attempt, by and by, to get up was not successful, but as he fell again he was aware that he still had on his underwear—and with this as his comfort, he sank down into the coarse and painful twigs and the dim, dim light from outside the long-locked depot seemed to fall entirely away. Next he felt cold. Next he felt nothing.

When at last he did come to himself, he felt quite sickened and unable to think much about his situation, but he did somehow know that he must rise slowly, and in stages. He was on his painful knees when he heard a voice from no very great distance, and in the otherwise deep silence he perceived the sound of footfalls on the paved bridge over the railroad tracks. Collecting his few fragments of strength, he lurched forward and burst out of the thicket, confronting a teenaged girl who, at once ceasing her low and offtune crooning of a popular tune, gave voice to a scream the like of which he had never before heard even on a television horror show—and, still screaming, she fled like a deer back the way she had come.

Looking after her, Stan happened to look at his hands: and saw blood. He sank to the sidewalk in a crouch.

He had no way of knowing how much time had passed before he heard, this time from some distance, the faint—but increasingly less faint—sound of a police-car siren. There was no other way to go. Back he fled into the thicket.

If indeed he wasn't following a faint track or path he somehow remembered from his boyhood, the feeble thought that he was gave him a measure of comfort—otherwise he might have screamed himself. In school he had been taught that a policeman was your best friend and he had never had any trouble with the police in his life, but what chance would he have—an older man clad only in his underwear—against the fear and trembling of a terrified young girl? The taint would never leave his name or person, he was sure of almost nothing but he was sure of that. He felt his feet give way and himself sliding sideways and down, coming almost instantly to a soft stop. He was in the cellar-hole of one of the little old houses so long ago demolished to make way for the development which never came. He crouched against the leaf mold and the drifted dust and prayed that no tradition of this might be in the minds of the policemen.

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The siren drew near, then ceased. He knew the car had stopped. The policemen didn't beat the bushes—he could not make out their words, but he could make out their voices, and they didn't sound excited. After a while they went away. Stan, in the safety of his hiding place, hoped that they thought no monster was on the prowl and that only the baseless panic of a young person, too young to be out alone, anyway, was the sole cause of the alarm. He also hoped that they had not gone for reinforcements or bloodhounds.

These thoughts helped liberate his mind to consider for the first time what might have been the cause of the attack upon himself. Robbery? Then why had all his outer garments been wrested off him? A hasty grope informed him that although he still had on his socks, his shoes had been taken. Finding no answer as to causes—no who, no why—he reflected on what he had better do next. And reflection told him that he had better make his way to the sidewalk again, walk a long block, turn off onto another long block, rap on the door of a house he knew was there, tell his story, and ask for the help that only a human being in sore trouble and deep distress has the right to ask of another fellow human.

The house was neither large nor old nor new. Stan had half hoped someone would answer his ring fairly soon, and so let his turmoil cease, and half hoped it would take a while, so that he might think of something immediately reassuring.

The door, in fact, was opened almost at once. One might say that it was flung open. The middle-aged man who had opened it took a look at Stan, cried, "*Oh,* my God!" and slammed it shut again. Stan, on the doorstep, heard a nervous voice say a word or two and heard the man half cry, "Will you get away from the phone, damn it? *I don't want to get involved!*"

Stan, as he moved rapidly off again into the cold and darkness, for the first time blessed the attitude of non-involvement.

Crouching in the thickets near the depot once again, Stan sent up a plea for help to the silent stars. Just supposing he risked the police seeing him thus—even supposing the girl were to say, "Well, no, actually he didn't *do* anything at all, I just got scared and ran"—he had with him no ID, no money, no housekeys, no one in the village he could think of to speak up for him. How would the police know he wasn't a vagrant? Should he resign himself to spending the night in jail and in the morning try to call his employers to send someone

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all the distance from the city with good words and cash for bail? No, no—not to be thought of. Even if they did it, it would be the end of his job. His career. Perhaps his life.

I can always smash the back window to get into my house, Stan thought. Wash off the dirt and the blood. I need my *clothes,* Stan thought. I need my size ten shoes, my size eighteen shirt. I need my size forty pants. I need my broad-shouldered suitcoat. If I had them all, I could walk home without fear, Stan thought.

As he crouched unthinkingly almost in the position of one about to start a footrace, something ooping and bumping and dimly lit slid into the stop by the depot: the never-taken-by-Stan, entirely-forgotten-by-Stan, soon-to-be-abolished midnight train. As might have been expected, very soon it slid out again. The first passenger, clumping briskly along, was very large. The second passenger, coming not so briskly, was a skinny little runt. The third passenger, strolling slowly and alone, *he* was just right.

DETECTIVERSE

GENERATION GAP

by JAMES NEILL NORTHE

There was a young fellow named Artie,
Whose greeting to Granny was hearty—
He grabbed at her purse
And matters got worse,
For Granny had mastered karate.

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NAL BOOKS

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a *NEW* short story by

ANNA CLARKE

Ronnie and Miss Pratt bent over the tailor's dummy together. It looked to Ronnie just as usual—a stuffed torso on a wooden stand, old and well used but still serviceable. "Turn him over!" commanded Miss Pratt.

On the chest of the dummy, slightly to the left of center, Ronnie saw the crude outline of a heart. She reached forward to touch it and discovered that it was formed of pinheads stuck into the dummy so that only the colored heads showed.

Anna Clarke, British, was born in Cape Town, South Africa, and educated at schools in Cape Town, Oxford, and Montreal. In Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers, *Larry E. Grimes calls her talent immense: "She breathes a true creator's breath into old conventions and cliches precisely because, as a writer of mysteries, she is bold enough to fashion them from the mystery of writing itself . . .*

THE MYSTERY OF PERCY'S HEART

by ANNA CLARKE

My name is Veronica Smart (Ronnie for short) and since my parents died I have lived with my Aunt Margaret and the four old women she looks after.

Parkview is a big Victorian house in a South London suburb. Each resident has a ground-floor room with a bathroom, and Auntie and I share the upstairs apartment. Auntie worries sometimes that I'm not "living my own life," and suggests that I should rent an apart-

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ment in central London with one of the girls in the law office where I work.

"It would need at least four of us to pay the rent," I reply. "I'd have half a bedroom and a quarter of a kitchen and I'd have to wait hours to get into the bath or use the phone. In any case, I don't want to leave you. I'd miss the old ladies."

"But you don't meet any men, Ronnie."

"I meet lots of men at work, and I go out with Bernie twice a week. And I don't want to be anywhere but here, Auntie. It's home."

In fact, I can scarcely remember any other home. Auntie's residents have nearly always been part of my life. I've sometimes thought I should like to look after old ladies myself one day, and so last summer Aunt Margaret suggested that I should have a try at it on my own.

We arranged that I should take a week's holiday from the office and that she should feel free to go out for the whole day the first day. "I'll cook their breakfast," she said, "and then you can take over."

At twenty-five past eight, I was coming down the stairs. Down at the bottom was Mrs. Morrison. She lives in one of the back rooms and has been at Parkview longer than any of the others. We are never allowed to forget this. She is ninety-one, a tiny, twisted little creature with dead-white hair, surprisingly plentiful, and very blue eyes in a little round face as wrinkled as a walnut. She walks with the aid of a frame that is almost as tall as herself and she is in the habit of leaning on the top of it while she talks, very much as a preacher leans over his pulpit.

Every morning when she comes out of her room, Mrs. Morrison crosses the hall and tilts the frame so that it knocks sharply against the door of the room opposite her own. Usually this is the signal for the lady who lives there to emerge, but on this particular morning she did not immediately appear.

"What's the time?" she called out instead.

"Breakfasttime," replied Mrs. Morrison in her high trembling whine. "Aren't you dressed yet, Penelope?"

"Of course I'm dressed, but I can't find my bloody specs. Damn."

The sound of a crash came from behind the door.

"Try your nose, dear," quavered Mrs. Morrison. She sounded as if she was trying to be helpful, but there was a hint of malicious glee in her voice.

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A string of oaths came from the room.

"Penny Pratt's lost her specs again," said Mrs. Morrison, turning to the other two ladies, who had emerged from their rooms, hungry for breakfast but even more hungry for action and drama.

"Oh dear, oh dear, she's blind as a bat without them," said Mrs. Longthorpe. "Do you think we ought to go and help her look?"

She is a long thin lady with a horselike face. Mrs. Rose, who lives in the other front room, is round and red and rather breathless. "No," she said, "you know what Penny's like if anybody tries to help her. I think we ought to tell the boss. Come on, everybody. Brekky's ready." (Mrs. Rose is very much the leading lady, even though she does refer to my Aunt Margaret as "the boss.")

There was another crash, even louder than the previous one, from behind the door of Penelope Pratt's room. "She's fallen!" cried Mrs. Morrison, sounding almost ecstatic.

"Nonsense," puffed Mrs. Rose. "It's only that old dummy going over again."

"Percy Pride," giggled Mrs. Longthorpe.

Miss Pratt had been a dressmaker and was still doing a little sewing when she first came to live at Parkview. Her poor old eyes were now much too weak for the work, but if it made her happy to keep the tailor's dummy in her room and pretend she was planning some exquisite creation, well, why not? said Auntie Margaret.

"Excuse me," I said, "I think I'd better go and see if she's all right."

They made way for me grudgingly. I was the boss's niece, but whether I had any status in my own right I didn't yet know.

"Ronnie—" timid old Mrs. Longthorpe caught at my arm as I brushed past her "—don't you think we'd better tell your auntie?"

"You go in to breakfast," I replied, "and I'll see what I can do for Miss Pratt. Tell my aunt we'll be along very soon."

They actually moved off then, all three of them, but I don't think it was anything to do with the note of authority that I had managed to put into my voice: it was the smell of frying bacon that drew them.

I knocked at the door of Miss Pratt's room and called her name. "Are you all right?" There came a little whimpering sound, but I couldn't distinguish any words. Really anxious now, I opened the door.

The room was terribly crowded and untidy. On about the only clear space of carpet, between the bed and the window, two figures lay on the floor entwined in a grotesque embrace.

I ran forward. One of the two disentangled itself and slowly strug-

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gled upright, swaying as if about to fall over again. I put an arm round Miss Pratt and held her steady. She felt surprisingly plump and firm and she pulled herself away from me with considerable force. "I don't want any of your help," she said in a loud and angry voice. "You hypocrite!"

She's mistaken me for someone else, I thought: I wonder which one of them. I glanced around at the tailor's dummy lying on its side on the floor and saw a pair of spectacles, out of the case but fortunately unbroken, lying on the carpet beyond. I picked them up and handed them to her.

She put them on and a broad smile came over her face. It had once been a very pretty face and had not completely lost its charm in spite of the frizz of purplish dyed hair surrounding it. "Ronnie!" she cried. "Thank you, my darling. Now you can see what they've done to Percy. Come and see, come and see."

We bent over the tailor's dummy together. It looked to me just as usual—a stuffed torso on a wooden stand, old and well used but still serviceable. "Turn him over!" commanded Miss Pratt.

I did so.

On the chest of the dummy, slightly to the left of center, I saw the crude outline of a heart. I reached forward to touch it and discovered that it was formed of pinheads stuck into the dummy so that only the colored heads showed. Miss Pratt had a large supply of such pins, together with much other dressmaking equipment she kept jumbled up together in the three drawers of a rather beautiful oak chest. I had often seen Percy draped with pieces of cloth and with pins stuck into him, and my first thought was that Miss Pratt had made the heart outline herself. It struck me as somewhat bizarre, but surely not alarming or distressing.

I stood the dummy upright and said: "Percy isn't damaged, dear Miss Pratt. Won't you come and have your breakfast now?"

Miss Pratt was no less fond of her food than the others, but still she hesitated.

"Don't you see, Ronnie? Somebody has stuck pins into him. That means a threat. They want him dead."

"I think it's meant to show he's very much alive," I said. "But it's rather a silly joke and I'm sorry it's upset you."

Eventually I persuaded her to join the others at breakfast, and went out into the kitchen to tell Aunt Margaret.

"Poor old Penelope," she said. "She's getting more and more ob-

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sessed with that old dummy. Obviously she put the pins there herself. You seem to have handled it very well, Ronnie."

"You don't think it's possible that one of the others— I mean, they do tease her about Percy. I'm sure Mrs. Morrison knew about it. You should have seen the look on her face."

My aunt agreed that the crippled old lady was at her most malicious this morning. "But she couldn't have placed the pins," she added. "She hasn't the strength."

"She shoves that walking frame about easily enough," I said.

"It's a different sort of movement—it doesn't require the same degree of steadiness and control. And in any case, she's not going to be able to do it for very much longer."

My aunt said this in a matter-of-fact voice. She is a highly qualified and experienced nurse, and has seen a great deal of coming and going at Parkview. I've seen quite a lot myself, but I still can't take it lightly, and these few words brought an unpleasant reminder of the twilight state our old ladies lived in: nothing but today ahead of them—beyond that, only the darkening toward the end.

"Ronnie, my love." Auntie Margaret did one of her quick-change acts from seeming hardness to great gentleness. "Would you like me to stay at home today?"

"Of course not." I leaned forward to kiss her. "You go and look at the pictures at the Royal Academy. I know you're longing to go."

Auntie's husband had been quite a well known portrait painter. Going to exhibitions was her greatest indulgence.

"Play it cool, darling," she said when she was ready to go. "They'll make a big drama out of it if they can, but you must disappoint them. If you need any help, call Mrs. Green at the Park Rest Home. And in any case Dr. Leslie will be coming in this afternoon to see Mrs. Rose."

I got her off at last.

My first task was to clear the dining room and wash the dishes, a simple job that would have taken only a few minutes had I been left in peace. But all four old ladies wanted to help—or rather each one wanted to appear to be more useful than the others.

"I'll carry that plate," said Mrs. Longthorpe.

"No, dear—you'll drop it." Mrs. Rose to the fore.

"Not in there, Penelope." Mrs. Morrison, too handicapped to clear the table herself, still enjoyed playing her part. "You ought to know by now that the salt goes in the *left*-hand cupboard."

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Miss Pratt took no notice at all. It was impossible to tell whether she was just being her usual rather unruly self or whether she was deliberately needling Mrs. Morrison. I was glad when the clearing up was finished. It had taken even longer than usual and it was beginning to get on my nerves.

The signal for a general exodus from the kitchen came from Mrs. Rose, who looked round with a proprietorial air. "Well, I don't think there's anything else we can do for Ronnie. It's a fine morning—I think I shall walk over to the Park Rest Home."

Mrs. Rose had a cousin who resided there, a meek little man called Frederick Long. Whether he really appreciated this almost daily visit was a matter for conjecture.

"What about you, Ella?" Mrs. Morrison twisted her head to peer up at Mrs. Longthorpe. "Are you going to spend hours trying to improve your face?" She really was dreadfully spiteful this morning. While I was debating whether to intervene, Mrs. Longthorpe responded with dignity.

"It's a cream to protect the skin from sunburn. That's the only reason I use it."

Mrs. Morrison muttered something I couldn't hear and then added in a louder voice, "Miss Pratt's gone out. I wonder whether she's gone."

None of the rest of us had seen her go. Anxiously, I ran to the front door. There was no sign of her. I ran to the gate.

Thank God. There she was, crossing the road a few yards away. Unmistakable was the purple hair and the pink-cotton dress. I raced toward her. "Miss Pratt—where are you going? You never told me you were going out."

"Didn't I sign the book?" She looked genuinely surprised. "Didn't you look in the book?"

I shook my head. Actually, the signing-out book was not often used. The old ladies preferred to announce what they were doing, and since they had to ring the bell to get back into the house whoever was on duty always knew when they were back. "You ought to have looked in the book, Ronnie," said Miss Pratt. "That's what the bloody thing's for, isn't it?"

"Yes, of course. I only came after you because I knew you'd had a bit of an upset this morning and I wondered—"

"You wondered whether I was going off my head." Suddenly she smiled. "I'll tell you, Ronnie, because I like you. But don't tell the others. I'm going to get on a bus and I'm going to Victoria Station.

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And when I get there, I'm going to sit in the snack bar. I'm going to have a cup of coffee and a cream cake and I'm going to look at people, lots and lots and lots of people, all sorts and sizes and all colors and all ages. If I don't get away from those three old bitches who all hate me, I really am going to go mad."

I didn't know what to say. Miss Pratt did seem to be in a very odd mood, but her words had come from her heart and couldn't fail to find an echo in mine. They had so little of life and action, the old ladies, so little variety. Always the same faces, always the same talk. They hadn't chosen each other's company. It was really rather surprising that they got on as well as they did.

But Miss Pratt didn't fit in. She craved for the great world outside and wasn't content with the little dramas created by the other residents at Parkview.

The others knew this, of course. Did they resent her? Had one of them, or perhaps all three, decided to take revenge?

The pinhead heart began to take on a more sinister dimension in my thoughts. Surely Miss Pratt had not done it herself. What would my aunt do if she were here? Try to stop Miss Pratt going out? Ought I to try? But how?

"Please, dear Miss Pratt," I said, "*do* take care of yourself. I'm going to worry about you all the time until you get home."

She smiled at me. "I'll be all right, darling. I've been a Londoner all my life. I'm a funny old thing, aren't I, but I've still got the use of my legs and my tongue. I think I'll have lunch in the Grosvenor Hotel," she added thoughtfully.

I returned home feeling somewhat reassured. Miss Pratt appeared quite capable of taking care of herself and she looked no more eccentric than thousands of other old women getting on and off buses in London streets. Perhaps it was living at Parkview that made her behave in a peculiar way, I thought as I prepared the vegetables for lunch.

It was a dull meal. All three ladies seemed dispirited, as if the breakfasttime excitements had exhausted their little store of energies. Miss Pratt's absence was scarcely remarked on, although it was in fact most unusual for any of them to be out for the main meal of the day.

"The meat's tough," complained Mrs. Morrison, pushing aside a piece of roast lamb.

"I prefer it casseroled myself," said Mrs. Longthorpe.

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"I always think mint jelly is rather tasteless," said Mrs. Rose.

I knew there was nothing wrong with the food. Actually, I'm rather better at cooking than my aunt. This was a sort of grumbling rebellion. They were getting back at me, resentful because I had given so much attention to Miss Pratt. There was tension in the house and I had lost all desire to assert my authority. All I wanted was Miss Pratt's safe return and to stave off any more problems until my aunt came home.

The summer pudding, which is one of my best dishes, came in for its share of criticism, but at least I was spared the charade of being helped to clear away. All three retired to their rooms when the meal was over.

The house was very quiet. No sound of television or radio came from behind any of the closed doors. After I had let the doctor in to see Mrs. Rose, I decided to do some gardening. Tugging away at the weeds helped a little to ease my restlessness and my anxiety.

The hours passed and still Miss Pratt did not return. At ten past five I went into the kitchen to prepare the residents' tea. They could have boiled eggs, I decided. If everything I cooked was wrong, then why should I take any trouble?

At half past five, I came into the front hall to ring the bell for tea. All the doors were shut, but I had the strong impression that one of them had recently been opened, quickly shut again, and that there were ears pressed close to keyholes, listening and waiting.

The silence was uncanny: I almost dreaded seeing the doors open.

I don't know what instinct drove me to look into Miss Pratt's room before I rang the bell. At first glance, it looked just as I had left it in the morning. Percy was standing on the mat by the window with the light behind him, so that I did not immediately notice what had happened to his front. I moved closer and felt an unpleasant little jolting of my heart. The outline of colored pinheads was still there, and in the center was pinned a piece of plain white paper. With feelings of apprehension and disgust, I drew out the pin and read the clumsily printed words:

"NEXT TIME IT WILL BE YOU!"

It had to be the work of someone in the house, one of the three old ladies. Nobody else had been in today except Dr. Leslie, the elderly practitioner my aunt had known for years. That he should do such a thing was unthinkable.

Mrs. Morrison, Mrs. Longthorpe, and Mrs. Rose. One of them had done this.

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How lucky that I had got there in time to prevent Miss Pratt finding the message. Hastily, I pulled the rest of the pins out of Percy, dropped them into an ashtray, which was the nearest receptacle I could find, looked into the bathroom to check that nobody was lurking there, and ran upstairs to put the piece of paper on the table in my room.

When I came down again, they were all in the hall, Mrs. Morrison banging with her walking frame against Miss Pratt's door, Mrs. Longthorpe asking plaintively when they were going to have tea, and Mrs. Rose, very red in the face, puffing her way toward the dining room.

"I'm sorry it's late," I said, turning to Mrs. Morrison. "We won't wait for Miss Pratt. She's not in yet."

The little head twisted sideways. "Are you sure she's not there? Why don't you go and look?"

She knows about the note, I thought. She wants to watch me find it. They all know about the note. It's a conspiracy, a persecution of poor Miss Pratt.

Suddenly I couldn't bear to be with them. I left them to grumble over the inadequacies of their tea and ran upstairs to seek comfort in my own dear familiar room.

I picked up the little piece of paper and all comfort fled.

"Next time it will be *you!*"

Why was Miss Pratt away so long? Had she decided not to come back? Or had she had an accident? My fearful thoughts ran riot. I went into my aunt's bedroom and picked up the telephone and clung to it as if it were a lifeline, but still I couldn't decide what to do. Call the police? The Grosvenor Hotel? Victoria Station?

What was the matter with me? Why could I take no action? I'd never got into such a state before.

There was a list of emergency numbers beside the phone. My fingers found the first one on the list.

"Dr. Leslie's office," said a brisk voice.

"Is the doctor there?" My voice was trembling.

The brisk tone became soothing. "He's just finished surgery. Would you like to speak to him?"

I poured out my story.

"I'll come right away," said the soft Scots voice.

I waited upstairs until I heard the front doorbell. I couldn't bear

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to encounter those three faces, the little twisted one, the long horsy one, and the round red pudding.

"Dr. Leslie—oh, how glad I am to see you!"

He was a little white-haired man. Some said his medical skills were out of date, but he was a sane and responsible human being and that was all that mattered to me.

I dragged him to Miss Pratt's room. I had the note in my hand and explained about the heart outline and told him about Miss Pratt wanting to get away.

"Take it easy, lass," he said. And then: "Why didn't you tell me this when I came to see Mrs. Rose?"

"Because I wanted to try to manage on my own, and in any case that was before *this* happened."

He glanced at the piece of paper again. "It'll be covered with your fingerprints," he said.

"You think that matters? You think it's a matter for the police?"

"I hope not. We must see what your aunt thinks. I'm going to stay here till she comes back. Maybe you'd like to get on with your gardening."

"What about Miss Pratt?"

"I shall make some phone calls."

And that really was the end of my personal involvement with the whole affair. In a state of shamed relief, I went out into the garden and soon recovered my normal balance of mind. Never again did I want to be left in charge of the old ladies: it was not my scene. I would stick to being a law typist.

But I must finish my story.

The result of Dr. Leslie's telephoning was that Miss Pratt was discovered fast asleep in a corner of the lounge at the Grosvenor Hotel. In front of her was a table bearing the remains of cream cakes and scones and other goodies. She was sent home by taxi, and my aunt, who had by this time returned and taken over, helped her to bed and gave her some indigestion tablets.

Meanwhile, she and Dr. Leslie had talked to the other three ladies, and Mrs. Longthorpe had confessed to the pinwork on Percy.

Apparently it was a most dramatic scene.

"Nobody ever takes any notice of me!" Mrs. Longthorpe had cried. "Mrs. Rose bullies me and Mrs. Morrison despises me and I come last in everything and Miss Pratt won't talk to me, and I think she's mad, mad, mad!"

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In the end, my aunt had to give her a sedative.

The following day, Parkview settled down to its normal routine and I took my aunt's advice and went to stay with friends in Brighton for the rest of my week's holiday. Bernie joined me later and we fixed up our future.

I came home Sunday evening to find my aunt and Dr. Leslie watching television, very cozy and homely.

"Don't go, Ronnie," he said as I was about to retreat. "We've got something to tell you."

I just stopped myself from saying, "What, are you two engaged, too?"

"We've solved the mystery of Percy's heart," said my aunt.

"I thought Mrs. Longthorpe did it."

Dr. Leslie shook his head. "She enjoyed confessing, but she wasn't responsible."

"Then who—?"

"Penelope herself," said my aunt. "We got the paper tested for fingerprints, and apart from yours the only others are Miss Pratt's."

"But it's impossible." The events of the day came flooding back to me. "The note was put there when she was out."

"Think back," said Dr. Leslie. "Did you go into her room after she had actually left the house?"

"Not until teatime," I admitted.

"There you are, then."

"But why?" I looked at them. "I like Miss Pratt," I went on. "She's still so very much alive. She hasn't given up like the others."

"Ronnie, my love, I'm afraid we have bad news for you," said my aunt.

Suddenly a little cloud darkened my happy future. "She's dead," I said.

They didn't deny it.

"How did she die?" They glanced at each other. "Don't tell me, I know," I went on. "It was a heart attack, wasn't it?"

"It could have happened at any time," said the doctor.

"But she knew it was coming." I felt near to tears. "She was very frightened and she tried to pretend it was Percy." I turned to go. I felt that I had had too close a glimpse into another human heart. "At least she enjoyed her cream cakes," I said as I left the room.

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a *NEW* short story by

JONATHAN WEBSTER

Sometimes Kane thought that if he had put the effort and time into researching his disease, he might have it licked by now. But the doctors were idiots with their textbooks of static fact. Every fact in the universe floats on a sea of infinitely and constantly changing other facts! But, oddly, he didn't really care about his own life. He wasn't important here, only his work. Otherwise he was just a member of a category, like anyone else.

We wrote to Jonathan Webster asking if he would try a story for us after reading an exceptional story by him ("Gwen") in the Boston Globe Magazine. *(You don't think we just wait for authors to come to us, do you?) Mr. Webster's work has also appeared in* Bostonia, Yankee, Harper's, Family Computing, Coastal Journal, *and elsewhere. Other recognition has come in the form of a 1987 Artists' Foundation Fellowship in Fiction, Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Council on Basic Education, and a 1977 Robert Frost Scholarship in Prose to the Breadloaf Writers' Conference . . .*

GOD'S HACKER

BY JONATHAN WEBSTER

From my window I can see what used to be "my" park when I was well enough to use the elevator. Now that it is late fall and the leaves are gone, I can see quite clearly again. I watch the young boys who play ball and the old men and women, the cops and winos, even the dogs who come and go over the weeks and months. They do change, even in that little time—their relationships change with one another, the asphalt and chain link, the rising and setting

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sun—but most of all I notice their sameness, their distinct and particular patterns.

We are much less free than we think we are. We trap ourselves in our own passion for habit. To become no more than data is to risk death. Not spiritual death alone—no. Once a person enters the realm of sufficient probability, I can kill him with the push of a button from where I sit.

For me, the charm of Dr. Vandermann's "hack" was that he was just another goggle-eyed company compu-geek whom the company had made to learn economics, a fundamentally harmless fellow forged by greed into a fearsome weapon of capitalism. They should have left him alone, because now their hottest programmer is cooling his kilobytes at Fort Greene (six to ten for grand larceny and various SEC abuses). Ask any broker. Some people just don't know when to quit.

Sometimes I had to laugh at guys like Vandermann, because I was just born that way—acquisitive, that is. The other edge of that sword, of course, was that the company forced the "dealers" like me to learn more about programs and equipment than we would ever need. Redundancy is wonderful in the Army. In a supposedly high-profit situation, it is dead weight.

The evening of my first class in Pascal was probably the last night of my affair with Maria. It wasn't just a matter of the hours of homework, but in a way I had found a whole new sort of relationship. It seemed that I had found a new world where I could have infinite power, where I could control pieces of information the way God controlled the stars and on a nearly equal scale. Suddenly nothing farther away than the keyboard interested me.

When I wasn't staring into the screen, I was on the phone to Vandermann, who had gone from a geek to a guru in my eyes. Maria had no place. She stayed on at the apartment, anyway. When the illness began, perhaps she thought things would change back. And though I depend on her now for many of my routine needs, the love is gone and the need just makes me feel resentful. She is still a beautiful woman with the patience of some Spanish saint, but to tell the truth, if I could find a robot to do her work, I would buy it. My guilt just makes me angrier, so that I dread the sound of her footsteps in the hall.

Maria understands none of this. I have asked her to leave, practically ordered her out, but she won't go. She only looks at me with those great brown eyes filled with pity and compassion. As the speed

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and power of the computer satisfies an inner need in me, it may be that I am a sort of cross, a burden that helps her make sense of her life. All I know is that she is driving me crazy and if I can't get her out of the house soon, I will have to do something drastic.

Most stock analysts spend their lives trying to find the single magic statistic that will make them rich. Vandermann's program went the other way—he used them all, every stat from every security from every database as far back as he could find; then he did what he called a "megacrunch," a massive, endlessly repeated set of weighted comparisons to dump out a single index. It was really a sort of crude and machine-intensive precursor to what they call "parallel processing" now. Of course he went to jail for fraud and embezzlement, but not because the index failed—because the index worked! With that much data, you can spit in the face of "error" and "significance."

But Vandermann was a strange combination of curiosity and practicality. What these past years in jail have done to his world view, heaven only knows. Apparently a couple of people from work still write to him and keep up. The state has no room for the poor bastard up at the farm at Algonquin where they usually send the harmless ones, so he gets switched back and forth between Fort Greene and Lathrop. From the horror stories, particularly from Fort Greene (Hell itself, it turns out, is only six miles away), one can only be sure that the Vandermann who went up will be a very different man when he gets out.

For my own part, if I was once a materialist, the disease has changed all that. As any of us in a wheelchair will tell you, the power of money is limited indeed. Religions were not begun for gold but to understand and control the power of death itself. I am very close, in fact, thanks to Vandermann's beginning, less than two city blocks away.

I use Maria as my rat. Spare me the moralizing, she deserves it. Never in the history of the world has there been a more sanctimonious, prying, sniveling excuse for a human being. Her younger sister—soon, she would have you believe, to be canonized—suffered the same disease, suffered long and bravely and died. So what? Is it my fault her sister's employer was not as well insured as mine? All I want is to be left alone. If Maria won't do that, she will have to "help" me with my project. I loved Maria, I think, but that is another story—for another lifetime, perhaps.

I offer in my own defense a case in point. This was Thursday of

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last week. It was about noon and I am on line to Lockheed's huge computer in Van Nuys. The Feds lease space on it for archives, and I am sucking up old census figures from the dawn of creation—vital stuff for the project. I don't normally hook up during prime-time. The company hasn't canceled my ID number yet, but I still have to pay the phone bills (though I guess I could get around that, too). In any event, this all takes concentration. My data conversion filter is fussy and lots of things can go wrong between here and California.

So she starts knocking on my door.

"Kane, it's time for lunch—" in her revolting little singsongy voice.

"Just wait a minute, Maria," I say.

And in she walks with her little tray with the syringe and the inevitable pathetic cheese sandwich. "I know you don't like to take your medicine, but the doctor said eight, noon, and four, and it's noon now." Why does she always knock if she's just going to barge in anyway? Then she starts looking over my shoulder and asking all sorts of questions as if she cared. What is that data about? How does the filter work? Will I teach her how to calculate a standard deviation?

Standard deviation—give me a break! Who could concentrate with some woman waving a hypodermic at him and asking questions about standard deviation? I'm sure she read in some book that a nurse is supposed to be solicitous and try to share the interests of the patient. But I don't want her to be my bloody friend any more. I want my shots, lunch and supper, and—well, yes, the occasional "errand." Other than that, I want her to stay in the guest room, play her radio, and leave me alone.

The woman's meddling makes me positively paranoid. If I didn't know better, I would think she has been "borrowing" my manuals and disks while I sleep. If I had the time I'd set a little trap, but I'm too close now to worry about her.

What Maria is useful for, however, is refining my "grid." Universities, the Justice Department, big-city PDs, everyone has looked at crime the wrong way. They want either the social motives behind it or its social effects. I'm taking the same data—occupation, race, economics, age, physical characteristics, and all the literally hundreds of other studied factors—and looking for only two things: time and place.

It is really quite simple. Any fool, for example, could predict with absolute accuracy that an elderly white male, dressed in a banker's suit, holding a bag of money at two in the morning in an alleyway

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behind a barroom in a ghetto on a Saturday night in August would be robbed. Change a factor and the odds go down, but it is only the 98 percent-plus probability cases I deal with.

It only makes sense that for each category of person there is a collection of circumstances which will result in certain victimization. You give me a crime and a category of person and I will tell you what they need to do and where they need to be at what time. I have worked and worked so that my "categories"—sets of common human characteristics—for this city contain 1,200 persons in the largest (about whom I know the least) down to fewer than half a dozen in groups like Maria's (where I know a great deal). Vandermann takes care of the rest. I can set my machine up with the real time of day and it will ring its little bell and print BINGO! on the screen when someone has bitten the dust out there on the grid.

Sometimes I think that if I had put the effort and time into researching my own disease, I might have it licked by now. The doctors are idiots with their textbooks of static fact. Every fact in the universe floats on a sea of infinitely and constantly changing other facts! But, oddly, I don't really care about my own life. I am not important here, only my work. Otherwise I'm just a member of a category, like anyone else.

Actually, Maria's category is not all that easy. She is employed and has no handicaps and has some education, so I have had to set her up a little, sending her places she wouldn't ordinarily go. You have to understand; I can't "make" crime happen. I just determine the odds and then mark the cards. Sure, you say, but the one or two percent? What about bad luck? Okay, some junkie could break into my room and kill me for my morphine, but I live in the wrong part of town. I lock my doors. I don't go out. Without loaded dice, the junkie loses ninety-eight rolls out of a hundred.

Three days ago, I sent Maria out and missed the location by a block and a half. Another woman, a little younger even, was robbed and beaten almost to death, according to the scanner. But I had the time within sixteen seconds! (To think I almost missed it! The disease is getting worse and I am nearly always feverish and I fall asleep all the time. Can you imagine missing something like that?)

Since then I have pumped through an entire additional gigabyte of good data. Of course she is getting a little gun-shy about going out of the house for me. She claims to have signed up for a night-school computer course at the community college and I am sure I can get her to "pick up something" for me on her way home.

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I've decided that tomorrow night is the last test. The only question is what crime? Robbery or assault are almost too easy. Homicide? Rape? Manslaughter? It depends on how far out of her way I can get her to go and how late I can keep her there. Wouldn't her computer teacher love to find out what I'm working on!

The rest of the class is on its way out the door. It is the type of drab, rented, storefront classroom that urban higher education resorts to from economic necessity. An assortment of patched-up and outdated personal computers sits along one wall, but only one is still turned on and working.

The teacher sits back in his chair. A student, a woman, sits on a corner of his desk.

"He is very, very sick now. He can't last very much longer."

"I feel sorry for you, Maria," the bearded and bespectacled teacher says. "It can't be very nice to watch a man die slowly."

"I only thank God I found you, and that you knew what he was doing. I would be dead by now for certain. And who knows how many others he has 'killed.' "

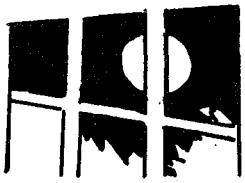
"Good night, Dr. Vandermann," the last student says on his way out into the night.

"The question, Maria, is what we will do with the program once he is gone. It has the power to steal and kill and who knows what else—what happens to it is up to us."

"Well, I have to go now. Kane has more errands for me to do."

"To hell with Kane—stay with me tonight. We'll do his errands in the morning."

"Yes," she says. "If you're sure it won't jeopardize your parole, it would be fun to break out of the old pattern for a night."



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a ***NEW*** short story by

STRINGFELLOW FORBES

When the author first asked Richard to her home for soup it was on a Sunday. And she made the Soup of Perfect Unity—a blend of potatoes and leeks, chicken broth with not a trace of fat, and cream. It is chilled, and garnished just before serving with delicately fried parsley leaves which glisten with olive oil. With it you need only the shyest of white cheese, French bread, and a simple mountain wine . . .

SEVEN ART SOUPS

by ***STRINGFELLOW FORBES***

"In a year of change, when I learned many things, when I refined every aspect of my way of living, I came to the art of soup, an art so apt to life, so satisfying to every sense, so worthy of following as daily discipline and definition of the state of the soul, that I have begun this little book of teaching. There may be art in any seriously considered process of choosing, but I think there are few who can express themselves through soup, who know that every situation and emotion can be defined through this simple elemental food.

"To begin: However we may live, each of us is alone, a condition to be cherished—and to be overcome. There will be a time, if you live creatively, when your singleness is unbearable to you, when your fullness of self overflows and becomes treasure you are compelled to share, to give with joy, unfolding petal by petal your richness, your capacity for valuing all things. Fortunately, it is at just this time of ripeness that such singleness will be unendurable also to the perceptive Other, who will be attracted by your perfection and claim it as his—or hers—by right of recognition. At this time of coming together you will make the Soup of Perfect Unity . . ."

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It will begin this way, my slim book. I have it all in my head. Papa would be surprised—he would never have thought I could write anything but a business letter.

But it will have depth, Papa, and weight, as you always said the best things do. Because I've learned such a lot since I was freed to—

I miss him so, my poor papa.

—to live in an outward way, no longer penned by your notions of what a large daughter can do, no longer countering your rich owning with my bareness, your charm with my dry getting to the point, your masculine, almost European elegance—

Once I got into a taxi, Papa, that was full of your after-shave scent, and I fell back years and years to my desperate childhood, when I loved you so.

—no longer countering your elegance with my business suits and clipped hair, my blocky overweight disdain.

I have come into a lot lately. Papa died, a thing I had never thought of, and everything is now mine—every secret of business and old letters, of closets and attic, every lustrous chair and table, every warm, heavy piece of silver. Why had I not imagined it? He was not young. But he was eternal, the unending corrective force.

It made me sick that he was gone. I wasted, couldn't eat, couldn't move. I was in the hospital for weeks, a puzzle to dozens of doctors. They did without me at Dobson and Aimes, though the new girl still calls me several times a week. I may never go back. When my downtown apartment building was converted to condominiums, I bought this small house and it was here I came when the doctors finally said they could do nothing for me, to regain my strength, strength that has come back as power. I can choose now, I have money, I have all Papa's beautiful things. I decide what I will take and what I will not.

You were always severe to me, Papa, about choices. But the choices started too soon, before I was trained in them. Mother died when I was only ten and you wanted me to be to you what she had been. It makes me laugh that anyone could have expected the scrawny child I was to come near the image of my elegant mother, who wore beads and flowered dresses, whose loose wavy hair just managed to stay in its bun, who rested in the mornings because of her bad heart and came downstairs at three o'clock in the afternoon bathed and dressed, smelling of powder and perfume, and who could inspire Hilda to go exactly by the recipe and produce palatable food.

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I can see now how it was: I was not your beautiful wife, you were not my comforting mother.

I tried, Papa, I really tried. My room stayed as Mother had arranged it. Even after I was a teenager, I kept the dolls and teddy bears, the ruffled bedspread. I brought my friends home to play—and later to play records, very low. I shopped with love and care for your presents. I wore the clothes chosen for me by your widow friends—dresses with lace collars, with piping and ribbons, white tights, black patent-leather shoes—until I realized how different this made me from the others, and then I did my own shopping, buying jeans, sweatshirts, and running shoes at the discount stores Hilda took me to, finding approval at last for the cheapness of my selections.

And it was always, "Great God, where did you find that shirt—or those hideous shoelaces, or that idiot friend, or this awful tie? We can't have it, send it to perdition, my dear." And you would laugh, and make your women friends laugh, too.

The shame, the hot twisting shame that sent me flying to destroy or to rid myself of whatever or whomever it was. Once, in my frenzy, I cut up a shirt and tried to flush it down the toilet, which overflowed and ruined the dining-room ceiling. I screamed at my only boy friend until he fled and told everyone in junior high that I was schizophrenic. And how many of your birthday and Christmas presents came to adorn trees, iron fences, dogs, drunks on the street as I cast them from me, Hilda shouting shame at me for the waste of it all?

Finally, unbearably sensitized, I wore only brown and beige and white. I saw my friends at school, but increasingly fewer of them outside as I gained weight, stopped studying, withdrew into solitude. I didn't dare to make choices, Papa. I owned nothing but essentials. I was heavy and dull, living a dull life.

But now lightness has entered everywhere—sun from outside, strength from digging, zest from accomplishment, health from the garden harvest. Soup as the essential refinement, art from making soup. Eating no meat or other gross food, I have become slim. I have let my hair grow and found it wavy, the red only lightly dimmed by grey, and I put it up in back like Mother did. My poles have shifted, the negative charge has become positive.

Papa is lost from this lovely world. How sad that he can't see his fourposter bed, his Biedermeier desk, his leather chair, his Adam table in my little white house where the curtains blow in the breeze . . .

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Healing for me began in the yard, when I turned from boredom with languishing and idleness to clearing and digging. And through the spring the garden developed, as new plants were delivered several times a week—poppies, cyclamens, freesias, dahlias, cannas, rose geraniums. I bought strong-colored flowers and they look beautiful together. It is not possible now to make a mistake.

That was how I met Richard, that was how, having gone so far beyond myself, I went further and took him for my own.

Would you be happy for me, Papa? You would see that I have changed, but would it make you happy?

Richard. Broad, clear, and honest as his name. He was the driver of the package delivery truck that brought me fresh plants all spring. He came with a box of herbs the day I painted the front door.

"Now would you look at that," he said. "Dark blue on the door and red on the frame. How did you think of that?"

"I like color now. It's rich, don't you think, blue and red?"

"This whole place is. You can tell someone cares for it. You must stay here and work on this yard all the time. Or does your husband help you?"

"No. No husband."

"My wife's gone, too. Not that she ever did anything much around the house. She was always out, even after the children came. Half the time I was the one had to feed them when I got home at night, open a can of soup or something."

"Soup is a wonderful food, but it's best homemade."

"I never had much soup made at home."

"Soup and gardening go together. I have fresh vegetables and herbs right here. I cook a bit, come out and hoe a bit, go back and add to the pot. I find it a very agreeable way to live, making soup and working the garden."

I looked at him—at his wide forehead, his eyes steady on mine, his mouth so clearly modeled, his shoulders and chest broad and deep. He was asking, waiting. I felt a great quiet in myself, a reaching and growing toward this most daring of choices.

A delivery man, Papa.

I asked him for soup on a Sunday. And I made

The Soup of Perfect Unity

"This soup is a blend of potatoes and leeks, chicken broth with not a trace of fat, and cream. It is chilled, and garnished just before

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serving with delicately fried parsley leaves which glisten with olive oil. With it you need only the shyest of white cheeses, French bread, and a simple mountain wine. I am not wise about wines and do not believe in great expense for them. Soup should not be dominated by any other part of the meal."

Richard arrived at noon, his hair black and falling onto his forehead, the sleeves of a white-cotton shirt loose on his big arms. We walked around the garden and sat a while on chairs in the shade, then we ate the perfect soup in the shadowed dining room. Afterward, standing in the back doorway looking out at all the green and coolness, his chest behind my shoulders, I felt him sigh. His hand came to loosen my combs but he held it back. He would come again, he said.

The Soup of Conviviality

"Here everything comes together, to float up into the spoon one surprise after another, as you tell your lives to each other, as you turn the facets of wit, sympathy, experience, good humor, and fantasy and let them sparkle. You will mingle chicken, beef, and sausage, noodle twists, and beans, parsnips, carrots, squash, beets, tomatoes, onions, and cabbage for their common ancestry in soups. There will be bread to break off from the loaf and a raw red wine."

The day was warm and still. We sat in the chairs under the tree as we ate and talked. He was divorced last year, he said, and lived now across town from his family in an apartment that seemed very empty.

We made love on Papa's high curtained bed. It was my first time and Richard was astonished. Richard, my own, I said. He said, Ah.

Your bed had not been a lonely couch, Papa. Lawyer to widows, you often had company at home and I was in the way, playing my radio just a little too loudly, hiding behind the noise. Many are the law offices that lost clients to you as word got around among widows as to how serious and courteous you were, how handsome in your rich dark clothes.

Though you never actually wore velvet, Papa, there was always some touch of it about you, some ancestral heritage of portrait elegance. You told the widows what they should do and they always profited from your competence and knowledge. You were their escort at concerts and parties, their adviser at auctions and antique shops, their agent with difficult family members. You never said there is

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no one so generous as a grateful widow, though you knew it well. You loved them all, Papa, that was your secret.

The Soup of Dark Delight

"It is frightening to know that he is yours, for how will you then sufficiently guard your ownership? And owning is not allowed for persons, anyway—women these days know that. But your hidden joy is there, to be expressed in this soup. Black beans and garlic, pureed to perfect smoothness, will be animated at the last minute by a spoonful of Spanish sherry and decorated with curves of avocado and a shaved slice of lemon."

They loved you, too, Papa. I found letters. My partridge, you called them. My pigeon. My dove. Ah, Papa, how sad that you are gone.

Richard was happy—his joy was there to match mine. I never explained to him the significance of the soups, trusting him to know everything with the intuitions of love.

We both thought he should come here more often, but he said he was too tired on working days. So the next weekend we planned supper for Saturday. I spent two days making

The Soup of Ease and Loving

"It is not hot, nor is it cold, but serve it warm as the air—mixed sorrel broth, sour cream, and minced shrimp, melded a day in the refrigerator, then gently warmed. It is the simplest of soups but needs care to mature properly. It is ordinary and rare, tart and rich, and nourishing without obvious potential."

At six-thirty, half an hour before I expected him, he walked in the front door, calling to me in the kitchen.

"I've brought a surprise," he said, holding up a bulky package wrapped in white paper.

I thought candy, I thought books.

"Steak!" he cried.

"But," I said, "I can't possibly—"

He put the heavy package in my hands and I dropped it on the counter. Already he had turned and was going back out to his car. I followed and watched him take a square box and a long bag from the trunk. "See," he said, starting around the side of the house to the back. "I've thought of everything. Portable grill—" he slapped the box "—and charcoal." He rattled the bag. I could only watch as he blithely set up the grill near the chairs under the tree.

It was August, very hot. Next door on the left, the Albert family

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had already lit their grill. I had been smelling the fumes from it even in the house all summer. Their children were noisy on the swing set and the baby was crying. On the other side, Cindy Appollinaris was lying in her lounge chair. I knew that because it grates on the concrete of her patio when she sits down. She and her husband sometimes party until late, but tonight she was alone—he pilots a plane for a local corporation and she had told me he was asked to fly to Brazil with only one day's notice and it was lucky he kept his passport up to date.

Richard sang to himself as he flamed his charcoal, waving to the Albert children when they swung into sight over the fence. I saw him wave to Cindy, too.

In the kitchen, finishing the soup that was supposed to celebrate our intimacy, I put the cheese out to warm and the raspberries in to chill, set the table, opened the wine, and checked the temperature of the big pot on the stove. When I looked out again, Cindy was standing on her side of the fence, talking her southern talk and laughing with my Richard. I heard him ask her to share our supper, but she glanced at the kitchen window and declined. Her golden head with its ridiculous just-out-of-the-shower hairdo disappeared.

"All ready in here!" I called.

"But we have a good twenty minutes to wait before the fire's hot enough. When steak is grilling, steak is king!" He was merry, in charge.

While I was thinking how to tell him he would have to eat his steak alone because I could never have such a thing on a plate in front of me, he came in and embraced me. "There's time," he said into my ear. "If we go up now, the coals will be just right when we come down."

I tore myself away, too outraged to speak, grabbed the soup pot off the stove, and tipped the Soup of Ease and Loving into the sink. I could barely breathe, my hands were shaking, my feet felt numb. He didn't say anything, but I could see his dismay. Rushing past him, I flew upstairs to the bedroom, slamming the door behind me so that he couldn't misinterpret my choice of destination.

From the window I saw him wander back to the grill and sit in a chair with his hands hanging. I saw Cindy approach the fence and speak to him again. To his credit, he barely answered her. He got up, picked up the bundle of meat, and left. The charcoal glowed on long after dark.

Did they betray you, Papa, your partridges and doves? Did they

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disappoint you with coarseness and lack of romance? Was it ever like this for you, did you ever sit desolate among your beautiful objects? And how did you entice them back?

The Soup of the Cloud of Thorns

"Chicken Velvet Cream is soothing, but it bears floating an airy cake of crisp prickles. This accords with your suspicions, alternately denied and stabbingly felt. Cut peeled salsify into tiny sticks, mix them with flour, and fry into cakes, one for each serving, to be laid on the hot cream soup just before eating."

He came again, after phoning and phoning to apologize in a baffled way.

I could tell he didn't know what he had done wrong, and that only made it worse. It was settled that we would have lunch on Saturday. He ate the soup impatiently, splashing it onto the tablecloth when he tried to break up the floating cake of salsify. What was salsify, anyway? he said. And hadn't I got any beer? Couldn't we have just an ordinary meal sometimes? The less I answered him, the more he heaved himself around in his chair.

Miserable, I had lost all my lightness and freedom—I was back in my defensive cage of silence and fear. When he had gone, I thought of Papa.

They never left you, Papa. You smiled and courted until they returned, until you could be the one to do the casting aside, such a specialty of yours. You were merciless. I've seen the letters and how they pleaded.

I willed myself to calmness and called him on Sunday night. A woman's voice answered, a woman who made three syllables of the word hello, a woman whose bottle-blonde hair always looks wet. I cut the connection without speaking.

You gave up on me, Papa, putting me aside as cruelly as you dismissed your erring widows. You sent me out to work at eighteen, moving me into my own apartment, a freedom I didn't crave as my contemporaries did.

I lived in that echoing, brown place, not daring to make it my own, as if it were a bus station. But haven't I, after all, learned your lessons?

I could no longer doubt it. Richard had betrayed me, departing from the honest character I had seen in him. What of perception, what of shared sympathies, what of romance? I had been so sure in this choice.

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"Send him to perdition, my dear."

First I must smile and court. This I did on the telephone, until he agreed to come once more.

The Soup of Parting

"Mussels there must be, not for flavor but to mask by their chance of sand any grittiness from the weed poison you will add. And put in tomatoes, chopped celery, canned white beans, wine vinegar—every wryness you can think of. He will eat it because he will be contrite. You may merely taste, too overcome by the reunion to be your normal self. Then get him out of the house, because he will soon be very sick."

I washed all the dishes and pots and buried the mussel shells.

Richard was indeed very sick. In fact, he died.

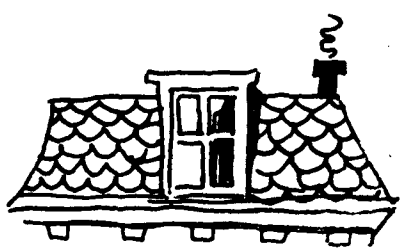
After all, Papa, one must have pride in one's discrimination.

The Soup of Consolation

"As simple and clear as life going on, this soup contains the balm of fish, white and innocent, and the bitterness of raw endive shredded into it, the black pepper of knowledge, and the lemon of slight regret. And it is red with tomato juice, for grief, for courage. It looks very nice in the bowl, vivid and interesting—a soup with character."

Could that be the doorbell? I've been musing so, stirring the pot, setting the table. Now who, at this time of evening—

Yes, officer. Oh, two of you. But I was just about to sit down to a bowl of soup. Soup is a specialty of mine. Oh, that is what you want to talk to me about? About soup?



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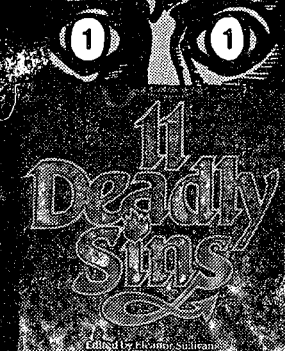

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a special reprint by

BOB ELLIOTT and RAY GOULDING

The following spoof by Bob and Ray is from the collection, Write If You Get Work: The Best of Bob and Ray. *In his Foreword to the book, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., says, "While other comedians show us persons tormented by bad luck and enemies and so on, Bob and Ray's characters threaten to wreck themselves and their surroundings with their own stupidity. There is a refreshing and beautiful innocence in Bob and Ray's humor."*

As witness "Rorshack" . . .

RORSHACK

by BOB ELLIOTT and RAY GOULDING

Dramatic theme, Establish and under for

ANNOUNCER: And now, *Rorshack*—the gripping story of a big-city cop who wages a tireless struggle to find crime wherever he looks for it.

Theme music up briefly and then out.

ANNOUNCER: As our scene opens today, Lieutenant Rorshack has just arrived at the site of a liquor-store robbery. Trying to pump information from one of those found in the store, a snarl suddenly crosses his face—

RORSHACK: Now hear me good, punk. You'd better spill everything you know about this, and you'd better do it fast. I don't care whether you do your talking here or downtown—but you're gonna talk.

PATROLMAN: Gee, I don't know why you're yelling at me, Lieutenant. I'm the patrolman who phoned in the report on this.

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RORSHACK: Skip the alibi. I want facts. What was stolen, probable suspects, the works.

PATROLMAN: Well, actually, it was almost too minor to bother with, Lieutenant. Somebody just shoplifted a cheap bottle of New York State wine. It was Chateau Schenectady 1973. And that wasn't a very good year—even for Schenectady.

RORSHACK: I get the picture. The crook using that M.O. has slipped away from me a hundred times. But now I'm gonna nail him and throw the book at him. *(Calls off)* Steinberg, Lopez, Caruso, come over here on the double!

VOICES: On my way, Lieutenant . . . Coming, Lieutenant . . . Consider me there, Lieutenant.

Sound: Running footsteps

RORSHACK: Okay, men. This ugly punk in the blue uniform has spilled everything he knows. And I've got a hunch it may be an inside job. Steinberg, you grill the store owner and see if you can beat a confession out of him. Lopez, get backup units to nail everybody on the streets who's carrying a wine bottle. Caruso, you take the bus stations, airports, rail terminals. The crook hasn't had time to get out of New York—and we're gonna see to it that he never does. Get moving.

VOICES: Right, Lieutenant . . . Gotcha, Lieutenant . . . Glad to help, Lieutenant.

Sound: Running footsteps

RORSHACK: All right. Now I've just got one thing to say to you, Mister Big-Shot Patrolman. If you're a cop on the take who's in this thing up to his ears, you'd better pray I never get a chance to tear you apart with my bare hands.

PATROLMAN: Gosh, I don't know why you think I'd risk my career for a ninety-eight-cent bottle of wine. But maybe I'd better call a lawyer just in case. Can I borrow a dime for the phone, sir?

RORSHACK: Well, I guess even a cop gone rotten has got some rights. Hey! Hold on! A dime's missing from my pocket. I just bought some breath mints to keep myself desirable, and I know the clerk gave me a dime in change. So now we've got ourselves a pickpocket caper, too. *(Calls off)* Steinberg, Lopez, Caruso, move it over here.

VOICES: Coming . . . Roger . . . Feet, do your stuff.

Sound: Running footsteps

RORSHACK: Okay, now it's not just a heist, it's a crime wave. Steinberg, search every customer in the store. If you find one con-

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cealing a dime, kill him. Lopez, put out an A.P.B. for anybody trying to pass a coin with Roosevelt's picture on it. Caruso, you take the bus stations, airports, rail terminals. Nobody goes in or out of this city until I give the word. Now get on it—all of you.

VOICES: Sure thing, Lieutenant . . . Right away, Lieutenant . . . It's as good as done, Lieutenant.

Sound: Running footsteps

RORSHACK: I wonder if breath mints help a headache. I got a real pounder.

PATROLMAN: No offense, Lieutenant, but maybe you shouldn't let yourself get so excited over small things.

RORSHACK: Small things?! To you, the theft of United States money is a small thing? Listen, dummy, I've been on the force twenty-seven years—and I know what this can lead to. Today, some psychopath will settle for a dime. But then he gets greedy. Before long, he's knocked over every bank and Brinks Express truck in the city. Eight million people are penniless and one hoodlum's got all the dough. I've seen it happen, but it's not going to happen again—not while I've got an ounce of strength left to fight it. You get me?

PATROLMAN: Sure, Lieutenant. Incidentally, while you were jumping up and down screaming, a dime fell out of your pants cuff and rolled under the table over there.

RORSHACK: Well, you can have it if you want. These days, a dime's not worth crawling around on the floor to pick up.

Bring in theme music under for

ANNOUNCER: And so, fearlessly, dauntlessly, and noisily, the battle-hardened Rorshack wages endless war to stop crimes that still haven't happened. Join us soon for more exciting police drama in the life of—Rorshack.

Music up and out.

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DETECTIVERSE

DOUBLECROSS

by M. B. FRANGIS

Comes now the defendant, one Laura Larew,
A striking blonde with eyes of blue,
Gracing front pages and TV screens
In full-length furs and designer jeans,
Jet-setting with high society,
A model of propriety.
Supported by fans throughout the land
As she glamorously takes the witness stand,
For her story has suffered a twist or two
And it's the State now versus Laura Larew.
Did she poison her husband, a rich old man?
"Nonsense," says Laura through her Palm Beach tan.

The jury is out, the evidence thin,
Not guilty the verdict! A solid win
For Laura Larew with her eyes of blue,
Who in all due time is married anew
And off with her husband to Paris, France,
To enjoy her huge inheritance.
"We did it, my love—" Hubby raises his glass.
She sips and says, "Together at last!"
Then falls in a heap from the poisoned wine.
"Sorry, dear," says he. "Now the money's all mine."
So ends the saga of Laura Larew,
Whose smarts failed to carry her all the way through.

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"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

TERRY MULLINS

The way Brinsley watched the butchering was the way children watch fire, the way young girls watch the first still snow of winter, the way old men watch young girls . . .

HIRED MAN

by TERRY MULLINS

Andrea liked Richard Brinsley at once. With his fine blond hair and his neat clothes, he didn't look like a farm worker. He looked more like a writer or an actor. He had an expressive face and a smile that could speak as eloquently as his hands. No, he didn't look like a farm worker. But Johnny introduced him as their hired hand for the summer and they were giving him the room over the shed by the barn. He had greeted Andrea with his most winning smile and surprised a smile in return.

Brinsley's suitcase was large, fairly new, and obviously heavy. That wasn't obvious when Johnny lifted it from the car. His large hands ignored the handle and gripped the suitcase on the outside as if it was an empty milk can. But Brinsley carried it by the handle, and though he was strong the suitcase dragged his shoulder down an inch and caused his long fingers to show white at the knuckles and red at the nails.

Andrea had cleaned the room over the shed and they showed it to him. It was a large room with windows at the front and a small bathroom built into part of the back. It was furnished with discarded but still useful furniture. Typical was the black-and-white television set they had kept when they bought a color TV. And there was an old dial telephone hooked up with the one in the house.

When Brinsley looked around, he seemed surprised and pleased.

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As they left, Andrea had gone halfway down the outdoor steps when she heard Brinsley ask Johnny about a key to the door. Johnny ran his fingers over the door sill but didn't find the key. He looked down at Andrea and asked if she remembered where they put it.

"I think you may have left it in the car after the Independence Day program," she said.

"Probably." He laughed and told Brinsley, "I played Ben Franklin."

They seldom used the key. Most of the time they left the door unlocked. Andrea's back-door key would unlock the door, anyway, though the ornate shed key wouldn't fit any house lock. Its large, fancy shape had made it perfect as the kite-flying key. They found it under the driver's seat in the car and Brinsley put it in his pocket.

That first day, Johnny showed Brinsley the farm—sixty-four acres of red Virginia clay with a few islands of limestone showing through. The low parts were green with corn and the high parts, where the limestone appeared, were brownish green with lespedeza—higher up was white with sheep and rocks.

Monday they would begin to cut the lespedeza so the sheep could have more room. Although Junior was in the Army, Johnny and Andrea could have handled all the work together but it made good sense to hire someone to help. There was no reason why a middle-aged couple should work themselves to death. Though they would scarcely admit it, they were prosperous farmers, thrifty, charitable, and intelligent.

It was still an hour and a half before supper, so the men went out to inspect the barn while Andrea began fixing things up indoors. It would be nice to cook for three again and eat in the dining room. She didn't think she would seat Brinsley at Junior's place, though. Let him have the guest place.

Half an hour before supper, the men came in. Andrea watched as Brinsley surveyed the living room. He seemed puzzled to find a built-in bookcase. Andrea was always interested in reactions to their reading. Neighbors usually commented on how many books they had. Brinsley, however, commented on the kinds of books. "You seem to like history and poetry," he said.

Johnny, now seated in his favorite chair, grinned at Andrea and replied, "You're in Vuhginya now. Catton and Freeman are as familiar here as Poe and Shakespeare."

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"How did you know I wasn't from Virginia?"

Johnny laughed. "You sure don't talk like a Suthener."

Brinsley laughed, too. "I guess I don't. But when do you read? I thought farmers worked all the time."

"We do sunup to sundown. But there's evenin' and rainy days and Sundays. We find time."

At supper, Brinsley was discomforted to find them bowing their heads and saying grace, but from then on everything went smoothly. Brinsley did most of the talking. He was a smooth talker, obviously trying to sell himself and confident of his ability to. He shared their liking for poetry, though he preferred Swinburne to Browning, Ezra Pound to T. S. Eliot, and Dylan Thomas to Richard Wilbur. Still, they agreed on Poe and Yeats. Johnny seemed to enjoy Brinsley's opinions. Andrea said little. She enjoyed poetry, but she didn't particularly enjoy talking about it. She was, she realized, that way about most things she enjoyed.

By the time the conversation and the meal came to an end, she had begun to feel sorry for Brinsley. He appeared to be a person who could never have a simple liking for anything. He couldn't even simply accept things for themselves. He had to fit things into his own framework. He would pick up a goblet, run his thumb up and down the stem, dip his finger into the liquid and rub the rim to make the glass sing. He couldn't touch anything without caressing it. His handshake had been intimate, not straightforward. He had admired the tractor from all sides before he got on it. And he seemed to select poetry to fit his mood or his taste instead of responding to it. He was, she realized, a disturbing person and she began to feel he might be a very disturbed person as well.

In rural communities, barriers between people aren't easily removed. This is true even of friendly people. After a week of working for John and Andrea, Brinsley appeared to think he had taken their measure. From then on into the summer, he began to flirt with Andrea. This amused her but added to her uneasiness about him. He was ten or fifteen years younger than she was and self-consciously good-looking. He could probably have found more than one young woman in town who would have responded to his charm. But he never went into town, never attended the little rural church, and he never went to any sporting events. It almost seemed to Andrea that he was using their farm as a hideout of some sort. It was a pity. And it would be even more of a pity if he started making passes at her. She stayed on guard and kept him at a distance. She still liked

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him and wanted to go on liking him, but she suspected that if he made an overt gesture and was rejected he might be dangerous. She took down Frost's "The Death of the Hired Man" and reread it. She shook her head. Frost never knew Richard Brinsley.

The busy summer came to an end. Corn was harvested and shucked. Silage was stored in the barn. Brinsley spoke of leaving by November. Then came butchering time. A sudden clear cold spell at the end of October gave the farmers a chance too good to be missed.

Butchering called for old clothes because there would be blood over everything. They forced John's huge hog onto the pickup truck and drove to the Carters' farm, where six hogs were to be butchered. By the time they arrived, mammoth iron caldrons of water were boiling over fierce wood fires. The women gathered in the Carters' big kitchen, ready to boil fat into lard.

Andrea took her place by the long kitchen window and watched the men, who wore only shorts or jeans and sneakers. Brinsley was handed a rope and told to be ready. She wondered what his reaction would be. He had said it was new to him and he acted with unaccustomed clumsiness, not knowing what to do next.

The Carters' hog was first. Pappy Carter killed it with a single solid blow of a sledgehammer and signaled for Brinsley and the others to haul it up on the scaffolding so that it dangled by its hindlegs. Then Johnny took a long knife and slit its throat. Blood gushed forth in a wide spray. That was the moment Andrea had expected Brinsley to flinch. He didn't. He watched with fascination as the blood drained from the animal. Then he watched intently as Johnny and others butchered it and sent parts to the kitchen. The way he watched was the way children watch fire, the way young girls watch the first still snow of winter, the way old men watch young girls. And it was the same each time. Six hogs slaughtered and six enchanted reactions from Brinsley.

It was still ten days before Brinsley was supposed to leave. Andrea shivered.

The men went into the Carters' wash house to slosh off the blood and change into clean clothes. Lines from Houseman came to Andrea:

"And here's a bloody hand to shake,
And, oh, man, here's good-bye;

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We'll sweat no more on scythe and rake,
My bloody hands and I."

The women finished wrapping the meat and each family stashed their supply in their truck and took off. Most of them would go to the Frozen Food Locker. Andrea and Johnny had emptied their freezer to hold their supply. Tonight she would cook fresh tenderloins.

When they got home, Brinsley said he was going to lie down and rest until supper. They promised to call him. He climbed the stairs and entered the room over the shed.

Andrea said, "I watched through the window."

"You noticed how he looked?"

"It frightened me."

"Yes. There have been other things. I passed them off because he was a stranger and his ways would naturally be different. But I didn't like this. Friday, when we start plowin' the corn field to make it ready for clover, go into his room and see what's in that suitcase of his."

At supper Brinsley was eloquent and entertaining. He had never eaten fresh pork tenderloin before and he found it the best thing he'd ever tasted. He spoke at length of the dishes he had liked in France and Spain. Then he spoke of some of the more disagreeable dishes he had come across.

Johnny took up the conversation at that point with tales of Army food he had endured while serving in Viet Nam. Brinsley asked if he had any souvenirs of the war and Johnny said no, he hadn't wanted any reminders. About all he had from that part of his life was his Army pistol. Brinsley asked to see it and Johnny dug it out from under the tablecloths in the dining-room bureau drawer. He handed it to Brinsley, who remarked that it was heavy, then felt the cold dark metal of the barrel, stroked the handle, and finally pointed it at the window and sighted along it. Then he broke it open and found it empty, closed it, sighted again, and pulled the trigger.

"It's quite large," he said.

"They had to be."

Brinsley sighted the pistol again and quoted:

" 'Oh you had forethought, you could reason,
And saw your road and where it led,
And early wise and brave in season
Put the pistol to your head.' "

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Johnny laughed. "What on earth is that?"

"That," said Andrea before Brinsley could answer, "is from *A Shropshire Lad.*"

"I might have guessed."

The weapon had the eerie effect of bringing the two men together and to separate them from Andrea. She had seen this sort of thing before. Men tended to forget the presence of women when they were drinking or gambling or staring at an engine of destruction. Brinsley and Johnny looked at the pistol quietly, meditatively, evaluating its merits and its limitations as a surgeon might evaluate the vital signs of a patient. Then Brinsley gave the pistol back to Johnny, who returned it to the drawer, and both men helped her carry dishes into the kitchen.

On Friday, Johnny and Brinsley left to plow and Andrea took her back-door key and climbed the stairs to Brinsley's room. She found it well kept. There was no suitcase in sight.

She looked under the bed. It was there, pushed back against the wall. She studied it so that she could return it exactly as it was. Then she pulled it out and opened it. Inside was nothing but a heavy black-metal case rather like a valise. The lock had been broken, so she unlatched and opened it—it was filled with foreign money, Bank of England notes. She closed it, placed it as it had been in the suitcase, and returned the suitcase to where she had found it.

Then she looked in the dresser drawers. Brinsley's few clothes were simply stuffed into a single drawer. Under them was a small automatic pistol. It was loaded. She put everything back as it had been and left, locking the door behind her.

After supper, Brinsley went up to his room over the shed and Johnny stood at the kitchen sink drying dishes and watching the steps to Brinsley's room. "What did you find?" he asked.

"He has a suitcase full of British bank notes and a loaded automatic pistol he keeps in the drawer."

"I was afraid of something like that."

"What do you plan to do?"

"We'll tell the sheriff tomorrow. We can't call tonight. The wires hum and Brinsley listens in."

"I know."

"And if either of us went out tonight, he'd know something was wrong. You'd better try to call the sheriff tomorrow while we're out

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plowin'. If you can't get him, don't leave any message. We don't want him callin' back at the wrong time."

She called three times on Saturday and the sheriff was out on patrol every time. It was the weekend of the football game between Virginia and V.M.I. and the highways were full of drunks. So Saturday passed as it always did on the farm.

Sundays, Brinsley slept late and didn't come to breakfast. This time Andrea and Johnny went to church a bit early and waited in the narthex until the sheriff showed up. He was supposed to teach the adult Bible class, but when he heard what they had to tell him he gave the job to Johnny and went back to his office. Johnny and Andrea heard nothing more from him that day.

They were just beginning breakfast with Brinsley on Monday morning when the sheriff's car drove up, followed by a shining black Escort. Two men in business suits got out. They might have been inconspicuous in a presidential cavalcade, but they looked strange walking up Johnny's gravel drive. Brinsley saw them and grabbed a carving knife from the sideboard.

"Tell them to go away or I'll kill you both," he said.

Johnny picked up one of the dining-room chairs with one hand and pointed its four legs at Brinsley. "I don't think so," he said.

Brinsley hesitated an instant and then ran toward the window and made a dive. He hit his head where the bottom and top sashes met and fell to the floor.

He was still dazed when the FBI agents led him from the room. "Jumping through windows looks easy in the movies," the sheriff told him, "but these old farmhouses are made of tougher wood."

As they went up to Brinsley's room, the sheriff told them what he knew about their hired hand. "Brinsley was in prison in England when he met Bunny Urquhart, a bank robber. They were due to be released at the same time, so they lined up two others who were to come out at that time and planned to rob an armored van. It took them a month to set it up.

"A messenger with a briefcase full of money was being driven to the airport in the back of the van. They held up the van, locked the guards and the messenger in the back, and got away. Two of them were arrested at Heathrow, but Urquhart and Brinsley never showed up. Two days later, they found Urquhart in the back seat

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of his car with his throat cut. A piece of canvas had been thrown over him. They've been looking for Brinsley ever since." He smiled for the first time that morning. "There's a big reward."

Andrea put Brinsley's things in his suitcase and gave it to the sheriff. He unloaded the automatic and put it in his pocket, then took a long look at the contents of the steel briefcase and latched it.

"Have you had breakfast?" she asked.

"No. They drove down from Washington early this morning and I've been pretty busy."

"Then have breakfast with us. Do you like fresh pork and pancakes?"

"I love 'em," he told her, looking out at the waiting car. "If you don't mind if I eat and run."

"Q"

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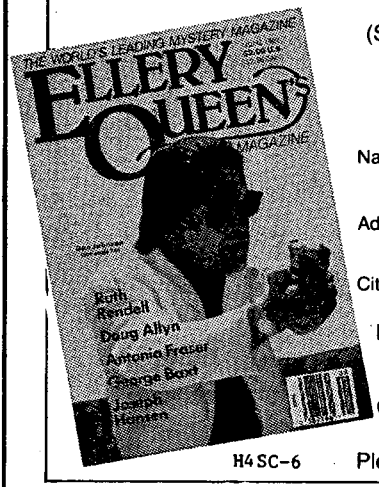

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a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

Peterson's technique was to go slowly, scraping a little from left to right, revealing the first digit or symbol. Depending on what it was, he would make a comment in a husky voice. For the number 8 or 9, he'd say, "Yeah, sure." Because the greedy barons who led the public into temptation with their lottery could be expected to allow the occasional picayune win . . .

THE LOTTERY TICKET

by WILLIAM BANKIER

Because it was his week to buy the lottery ticket, Gordie Peterson jumped off the bus one stop early and went into the news agent's shop. He slid a pound across the counter and said, "Ticket, please." During his years back home in Montreal, he had regularly bought Loto-Quebec tickets without winning much. Now that the Greater London Lottery was established, he and Michael were in a routine of taking turns.

"Good luck." The old man behind the counter shoved a ticket his way. Peterson took it into a quiet corner behind a rack of paperbacks to check the numbers. The best he or Michael ever did was an occasional ten-pound winner—this meant wine instead of lager with their vindaloo that evening. Michael with his steady job was able to postpone the excitement until they were in the pub, priming themselves before walking across the road to The Bengal Tiger. If his ticket was worth money, he could spend that amount and claim later. Peterson, the freelance artist, was always strapped for cash. He had no option but to turn in a winning ticket on the spot.

Taking out a coin to scrape the coating from the numbers, he noticed on the rack a novel displaying one of his covers. His mood

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improved. This was one thing Gordie Peterson could still do rather well. Even reduced to the paperback format, his artwork sang. Peterson women, especially, looked more beautiful than life. They wore a glossy, sexy patina that pleased publishers when he could achieve it. And if he would only deliver on time. Failure to do so was the story of Peterson's life, and the reason he was not earning good wages like Michael at the ad agency.

Peterson took his time scratching off the opaque material on the ticket. The grey substance masked a set of digits. They were like poker hands, and you needed three of a kind. Three eights paid a pound. Three nines meant a fiver. Three tens was good for ten quid. Three Jacks meant fifty pounds, three Queens a hundred, three Kings five hundred, and three aces (which only happened in dreams) was a five-thousand-pound payday.

Peterson's technique was to go slowly, scraping a little from left to right, revealing the first digit or symbol. Depending on what it was, he would make a comment in a husky voice. For the number 8 or 9, he'd say, "Yeah, sure." Because the greedy barons who led the public into temptation with their lottery could be expected to allow the occasional picayune win.

Today, however, he uncovered the letter A. This tapped the cynicism stored inside the hard-up former art director. "Forget it." To see an ace symbol was to know you'd wasted your money. Peterson shifted his coin to the other side of the rectangle and scratched here. The symbol that came into view was another A. He laughed out loud. They did it all the time, the bastards. They printed tickets by the million carrying two A's along with a 9 or a 10 to make them worthless.

Even so, his heart was pounding and his mouth was dry. He had to change hands with the coin and wipe his fingers. Then he began again to scrape. The remaining material came away in shreds. He concentrated on cleaning off every fleck of it, blowing the fragments away.

His eyes misted over as he saw the sloping bar like the roof of an A-frame cabin he used to admire back home in the Laurentiens. What the hell else could it be? He scraped further. Dear me, oh damn it to hell, it was the side of the letter A! Lord, yes, here came the crossbar—it was an A! He finished it swiftly now with several desperate strokes, and there they were. Three A's in a row. Like milk bottles on a shelf. Like the wise monkeys. Three aces. He was holding a ticket worth five thousand pounds!

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"Are you all right down there?" The shopkeeper must have heard whatever response was coming out of Peterson's throat.

"Bloody hell, I've got a winner!"

"Bring it here."

Peterson did. "What do I do with this?"

The old man held it at arm's length. "You've got three aces."

"You can't pay this instantly."

"No. You fill in a form." He produced one from a drawer. "And you mail it to the lottery in Leeds. Along with the ticket. I have envelopes preaddressed."

Peterson's hand shook as he printed the required information on the form. This was airfare home. This was out from under all his debts. It could mean cheap digs in the south of Spain, cheap wine and food. Now there might be time to discover whether he could produce a few canvases he could show without embarrassment.

"Now you spend tenpence in the photocopy machine," the news agent said.

"What for?"

"You'd never put this in the post without a record for yourself."

Peterson placed the completed form and his ticket in the machine and made a copy. He folded it and tucked it into his shirt pocket. It was while he was stuffing the original into the envelope that a realization hit him like cold rain through a cottage doorway. He had won only 2,500 pounds. Half of the money belonged to Michael Medway.

There was no getting away from it. Week by week, they alternated in buying the lottery ticket. Every Friday, one of them wasted a pound. Once in a while, a ticket came good and they shared the winnings. But here was big money, more than either of them ever expected to win.

That was the point. Michael had no expectation of getting rich off this harmless flutter. Michael, with the flat he owned in Seven Sisters and his substantial annual salary from the agency, was doing just fine, thank you very much. If he never saw the 2,500, if he never even heard of it, Mike would lack for nothing. While for Peterson, five grand was the difference between privation and being able to set himself free.

The news agent said, "Just to take part in the celebration, I'll put the postage stamp on your envelope." And he did. "Your check should reach you within the fortnight."

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"Ta," Peterson said. He reached into his pocket and took out a crumpled pound note. "And I'll just have one more ticket," he said.

"I'm talking about the aluminum windows they advertise on TV." Michael Medway's appearance and his manners at table contradicted his status as the salaried one of the pair. Dressed in a woolly green cardigan with leather patches on the elbows, he held his prematurely balding head close to the cloth and spooned in his curry and rice like a stoker fueling a furnace. By contrast, the penniless Gordie Peterson sat erect in his dark-blue tartan shirt with color-coordinated pale-blue tie, breaking a fragment from his chapati, stirring it in vindaloo sauce, and then vanishing the bread between his lips almost as an act of last resort.

Between them, crumpled in the ashtray, lay the second lottery ticket with its worthless pair of 8s and a 10. "I've had to mortgage the flat all over again to pay for them," Medway went on about his new windows. "I managed to persuade Tara to have her flat done as well, so the entire building looks improved." Tara Sellers was Medway's neighbor and friend and occasional lover. She worked as a nurse at Knowlton Green Hospital. "The money isn't wasted, it's an investment," Medway concluded. "The value of my property is greatly enhanced."

When they left the restaurant, Medway looked at his watch. "Still time to run over to Soho. Catch a set at Ronnie Scott's." The friends had always made much of music. When Peterson was still employed at the agency, before a hangover kept him late for one client-meeting too many, he and Medway would wander out after five-thirty and drift down to St. James's Park, where the band of the Coldstream Guards was on the gazebo playing Elgar and Walton and Sousa. It was idyllic to nurse a six-pack on the grass, listening to perfect music played perfectly.

Tonight, Peterson turned down the jazz-club suggestion. "I don't feel like it," he said. It was true. The joyful irresponsibility that accompanied his toots with Medway was missing tonight. The booze was in place, but he felt sour and heavy. No need to search for the reason. He was concealing a 5,000-pound secret.

"Walk me to my car, then," Medway said. The ancient Hillman was parked in its usual place, half on and half off the sidewalk, London style. Medway got behind the wheel, turned the key, and they heard the engine cough and shudder and fail. It took three starts to make it catch.

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"Nearly a dead car," Medway said. He got it in gear, waved, and rolled away into the night.

Peterson saw a bus approaching but he let it pass. He decided to walk the three miles to his bedsitter in World's End, nursing his wickedness all the way.

When Medway drove onto his paved courtyard, the front door of Tara's apartment was open, color from the television screen glowing in the darkened living room. He switched off and walked across the lawn. When he came home late, her door was often open. He looked on it as an invitation, even though their season as lovers had dwindled mainly to friendship three years ago.

"Wee Folks Diaper Service," he said through the doorway in a sepulchral tone.

"Wear whatever you need," she responded, righting herself on the sofa, setting aside half a glass of red wine.

He went inside and sat in his chair by the window as she switched off the late news. "You'd think a prince could take the time to make his wife happy," she said.

"You should see Gordie Peterson."

"How was the great pornographer this evening?"

"His artwork is often in demand."

"Too bad he can't supply it. Are you still drinking?" She touched the wine bottle with a bare toe.

He took a sip from her glass. "Something was eating Gordie tonight. I never saw him so depressed."

"Something besides incipient alcoholism? And the inability to hold a job?"

"He's alone too much."

"Whose fault is that?"

"Maybe we should throw a windows-warming. Invite Gordie and let him sleep over."

"You owe that man nothing."

"Gordie and I turned out some of the hottest campaigns in the business." He finished her wine. Neither of them made a move to refill the glass.

She said, "My niece—you remember Lindsay—is coming up seven years old. I've been planning to throw a birthday party for her next month. Kids in the afternoon, evolving into an orgy for the grownups that night."

"Perfect. Seeing some kids will do Gordie good." Medway's eyes

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had become accustomed to the absence of light. "Hey, you've still got your uniform on. What is it about a nurse's uniform that makes a man want to rip it off?"

"Why don't we find out?" she said.

Ten days later, Medway's car died. A trusted mechanic knew of an excellent replacement for only a thousand pounds. But the deal would have to be done quickly.

Medway's frustration was intense. He had borrowed on his equity to pay for the windows and was short of cash. Armies of people took the Tube to work, but he was accustomed to driving. You could make a case for using public transportation, but he was reluctant to make it. And lack of a car was affecting his situation with Gordie Peterson. It had been necessary to cancel the previous Friday because he was visiting a client in North London and couldn't get back to the West End.

Today, however, he was available. On the telephone, Medway said, "Why not come around and pick me up at the office?"

Peterson wanted to refuse, but he had been saying no too often. "All right. But I'm not coming upstairs."

"See you in the lobby, then. Half five."

Peterson put down the telephone and sat staring at the check on his drawing board. The lottery office in Leeds had been quick off the mark. The envelope had fallen through his slot that morning. He couldn't believe it even now. Perhaps he might relax when they'd accepted his deposit and not laughed him out of the bank.

He got dressed for his rendezvous with Michael because he wouldn't be coming back to the room. It was as if chemicals in his bloodstream had turned on the lights—the threadbare carpet on sloping floorboards, his ratty wicker furniture, the couch he slept on with its unwashed sheets and the knotted pillow were all a disgrace. Only his drawing board looked respectable, and it was in disarray with folded newspapers under a saucepan from which he had eaten spaghetti two nights ago.

The blue tartan shirt was good for another wearing. His grey cords were wrinkled, but the real problem was shoes. He stepped into the cracked loafers with the heels worn almost to the uppers. But wait a minute, he was rich. Come on.

Peterson went outside and walked along the King's Road, past second-hand shops and council flats, heading for his branch of Natwest at the corner of Beaufort Street. The Man in the Moon looked

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polished inside—it would be open in ten minutes. A fresh wind was blowing from the river a block away.

Inside the bank, no band played a fanfare when Peterson put the money into his account. No flags were raised. The transaction lasted less than a minute, and he was outside again with his heart pounding and an audacious hundred quid in his pocket.

He treated himself to a shot of Jim Beam alongside his pint of Courage. Now he had a new problem. He was meeting Michael after work. Michael had better radar than the RAF. Michael would be on him like a terrier if he showed any sign of having spent money.

It wouldn't be easy. New shoes could be explained, even a new suit, by payment from a studio for recent freelance. But something as ambitious as the sabbatical on the Costa del Sol would require the demise of a wealthy relative in Australia. He could hear Medway's reaction to such an announcement.

"Who? Uncle what? How much did he leave you? Hey, Gordie, I can't believe it. You've been selling your body, man. You've been picking pockets in Park Lane!"

Peterson arrived at the agency building on Upper Regent Street, still putting his feet down self-consciously in new shoes. He had closed the pub in Chelsea at three o'clock. Then, under fair skies, he had walked to Knightsbridge, where he spent sixty pounds in Harrod's on the best shoes he'd owned in years. Trudging on through the tunnels under Hyde Park Corner, he sobered himself a little with coffee and cake in Shepherd's Market. Then he moved on to his destination with a time-killing interlude on a bench in Berkely Square.

Now he waited anxiously for his friend to appear. Medway was late. Secretaries and clerks left the elevators and hurried to the street. When Michael showed at last, he appeared nervous and failed to notice Peterson's new shoes.

"Talk about frustration. I'm missing out on a super car because I don't have the money."

"What's happening?"

Medway explained about the hardly used vehicle that was being vouched for by his trusted mechanic. It had to be a cash deal, and now. "You wouldn't like to let me have a thousand pounds, would you, Gordie?" Medway was picking a path through traffic toward the pub. "Know how shattered I am?" he called across his shoulder. "I forgot to buy our lottery ticket."

"No big deal," Peterson said. "They never win, anyway . . ."

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The first beer restored Medway's mood. He became philosophical about his daily commute on the Northern Line to and from Seven Sisters. "I sit in company with my fellow man. I share his hopes and disappointments. I am a better copywriter for being one with the market."

Peterson was not all the way down from his session in Chelsea. He was able to get up again quickly, and the friends began to have fun.

"Tara reminded me to remind you," Medway said.

"Looking forward to it. Birthday party next Saturday. How old is the kid?"

"Seven. You don't have to bring a present."

"I can afford a present."

Approaching the table after a visit to the loo, Peterson saw Medway's eyes flash down to his feet and up again. "Dim your shoes, man!" he said. "I'm dazzled."

"Collected for some freelance."

"Another cover illustration?"

"No. Hack stuff." Medway was capable of wanting to know which cover and when it might appear. "Line drawings of furniture for newspaper ads." He shook his head despondently.

One of the agency account executives entered the pub and approached the table. "Glad I found you," he told Medway. "You were supposed to write a greeting on the boss's anniversary card."

"I need the card to write on."

"Write it on a piece of paper. I'll take it back and somebody will letter it on the card."

Medway took out a pen and turned to Peterson. "Artist, give me paper."

Peterson found a folded piece of paper in his shirt pocket. He gave it to Michael, who scribbled a few lines of sentiment on it and pushed it across the table to the account executive, who took it and left.

After their Indian dinner, Peterson walked Medway to the Underground station. He promised to be on time for Lindsay's party on Saturday. And yes, he would bring his toothbrush and pajamas. He watched Michael descend slowly out of sight on the escalator, then left the station and went to stand at his bus stop.

Too bad about the car. But it wasn't a life-or-death situation. Medway himself had said it was doing him good to use public transport. He began to feel angry at Medway. Why should the sun rise and set on his need for a car? He already owned a flat—not to

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mention gold-plated windows. And a paycheck twice a month, with health insurance and pension all paid. If Medway got sick, he could jump the National Health queue and go directly to Harley Street. Peterson felt a flicker of anxiety under the manufactured anger. God help him if he ever contracted a serious illness—he'd end up dying of neglect in some rundown NHS ward.

The arrival of a bus interrupted his flow of self-pity. His mood was altered by the time he took a seat near an open window on the upper deck and began careening past the fine old buildings. Why dump on Michael? Half the lottery windfall was rightfully his. Had Peterson simply announced their luck on that Friday afternoon, the replacement car would now be his. Too late now, though. If Peterson came across tomorrow with the money, Michael would know he'd tried to cheat him.

Peterson let himself into his room and went directly to his drawing board. He switched on the lamp and picked up the brochures he'd collected from a travel agent's office. Malaga. Benidorm. As he opened the glossy folders and looked at photographs of blue skies and suntanned bodies lying on sand, Peterson's face was grim and he felt as if there had been a death in the family.

Tara tied balloons to the back fence. She and Medway carried tables and chairs onto the lawn, where they made an eating place for kids and one for grownups. Medway's hand-lettered sign on the front gate announced, LINDSAY'S PARTY IN HERE!

Peterson showed up with a wooden locomotive and carriages painted in primary colors and able to roll along solidly on fat wheels. The toy stood out among stuffed animals and frilly garments. The birthday girl loved it. She flitted back and forth to the chair where Peterson sat in shade, holding a wine glass that seemed always to be empty. She brought him an apricot and other things to eat. From behind him, he plucked a hollyhock bloom and a bud and joined them to create for Lindsay a dancer in a pink gown.

She ended up on his lap, her thumb in her mouth, watching as he drew stick figures on a notepad, little characters dancing or dueling or diving into a scalloped sea.

Medway and Tara watched from a distance. At one point, Medway called, "You need one of those, Gordie!"

"There's only one of these," Peterson said, "and she's already taken."

When the visiting children had gone home and Lindsay was tucked

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away in Tara's bed, the party became a little quieter but remained as intensely joyful. "I like your new outfit," Medway said. Peterson had arrived in dark-blue slacks and a white-linen jacket. "Freelance continues to pay?"

"For now," Peterson said. "I'm managing to save a few quid. I may head over to Spain for a cheap holiday."

Medway gave a thumbs-up. "Who says the struggling artist can't make it in this competitive world? Right, Taradiddle?"

"Right," Tara said. "And you can leave off the diddle."

By midnight, only a few guests remained. Lindsay's parents had taken her home at eleven. Tara's favorite tape—Brailowsky performing Chopin etudes and mazurkas—was playing at low volume. Peterson was stretched out on his back on the sofa, eyes closed, chest rising and falling.

"Is he asleep?" Tara asked.

Medway said, "I think so."

"He made a big hit with Lindsay."

"Mmm. Too bad about that."

"Should we tell him?"

"What's the point? He won't be seeing her again." Medway sipped some brandy. "I wish we could do something about her."

"We can't." Tara sounded impatient. "I haven't got three thousand pounds and her parents certainly haven't. Have you?"

"I can't even buy a car."

"I've just about had it with the National Health Service. As a nurse, I see the worst of it. Lindsay's just one of many queuing up for operations."

"The hell of it is that the facilities are there. If you can pay Harley Street fees, you can go in for surgery next week."

"Lindsay will be lucky if she's scheduled next spring." Tara swore softly. "I don't see how she'll make it."

Peterson couldn't remember going to bed. He woke up in the guest room with a dry mouth at three in the morning. In the bathroom, he stood looking at his face in the mirror. God, he looked sad. The conversation between Mike and Tara came back to him in fragments. Had he dreamed it?

Early Sunday morning, unable to cope with a strange bed and unexpected sunlight, he got up and dressed and went into the kitchen. Tara came in as he was sitting down to coffee and toast. They spoke in whispers at first.

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"Is Michael still asleep?"

"He likes to sleep late."

"Aha."

"I mean, I don't hear anything from him on Sunday mornings. Next door. You know what I mean."

"I have to say something," Peterson said. "Only you must promise never to tell Michael."

"All right."

He stared into his coffee. "I heard you two talking about Lindsay last night. Is she really ill?"

"I'm afraid she is." Tara named the disease. The medical terminology went over Peterson's head. "It's serious."

"And the National Health Service has her on a list. But for three grand she could get it done privately?"

"Yes. Sad but true."

Peterson marveled at the strength he was feeling. For the first time in weeks, his head didn't want to rest on the table. "I can get hold of the money," he said. "In cash. I'll bring it to you at the hospital tomorrow. Tell me when you're on duty."

"All afternoon—in Emergency. You can ask for me." She sat down and put a hand over his. "Can you do this, Gordie? I thought you were skint."

"I can do it." The delight in her eyes was radiant. "But never mention this to Michael."

He delivered the money in bundles, sealed in a large brown envelope. Tara met him in her blue uniform with white cap and sturdy black shoes. With scissors dangling on a ribbon, she looked ready for anything. She took the envelope from him and clasped it to her chest with both arms. Her eyes were moist.

"Is this really okay, Gordie? We'll never be able to repay you."

"It isn't a loan." He backed off, hands in pockets, feeling embarrassed but in control. "Take my word for it. This is the best thing I've done in quite a while."

Now that the nest-egg was cracked, Peterson felt free to dip into what was left. Spain was out. He paid his long-standing tab at The Man in the Moon, then sat at the bar in his new clothes and listed on a napkin the names of people to whom he owed money. The bank was still open. He went in and withdrew the required amount, taking it in large bills. Then he went outside and, with a confident flourish,

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hailed the first taxi coming down the King's Road. He gave the driver an address, then settled back in a mood of suppressed excitement.

As is the way with creditors, Peterson's were all accessible. For the next hour, he went in and out of offices and studios, making a splash in his well-cut suit, cornering a wary former colleague, enjoying the shift in attitude as he produced a fistful of banknotes and counted out the amount owing.

"What have you been up to?" an editor asked, tucking away the unexpected payoff.

"Good and evil," Peterson said. "The usual mix."

"You look on top of the world," was the comment. "See me next week, will you? I've a new series that needs the Peterson touch."

On the following Friday, it was Peterson's turn again to buy the lottery ticket. The news agent recognized him. "I see the check arrived. What a difference money makes."

"As the cynic said," Peterson responded, "it isn't who you are, it's how you dress. Nobody cares who you are."

He breezed along Regent Street to the pub where Medway had said he'd meet him directly from a client meeting. A horn gave two cheery beeps and there was Medway behind the wheel of a smart-looking sedan.

Peterson stood by as his friend parked. "You're mobile again," he said.

"It's the car I wanted. Only thirty thousand miles on the clock. Runs like new."

"Where did you get the money?"

"A sudden windfall. I'll tell you about it as soon as we get a drink."

Medway went to the bar and paid for two pints, which he carried to their table. Peterson said, "Cheers," and took a swallow. Then he repeated, "A windfall?"

"At first I thought I'd lie to you, Gordie. But I changed my mind. There's been enough lying between us lately."

"I'm not with you." Peterson felt the heat inside his shirt.

"You'll be happy to hear little Lindsay is no longer ill."

"She isn't?"

"She never was. Tara and I made up the story and did our scene where we knew you'd hear us. It was a hoax. I saw how you were with that kid that day. I figured this would make you cough up the money. And I was right."

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With his heart pounding, but feeling relief, Peterson said, "How did you find out?"

"Remember the message I wrote for the boss's anniversary card? On a piece of paper you gave me out of your shirt pocket? The following Monday, the artist who did the lettering gave me back the paper—he thought I might need what was on the other side. A photocopy of a lottery claim for five thousand pounds. With your name on it, Gordie."

A succession of things to be said rolled through Peterson's mind. He remained silent. At last he said, "You bastard, you conned me!"

"I was too embarrassed to confront you."

The tension around the table was beginning to ebb. Their eyes met and held. Then Peterson blinked. "You took three thousand. That's more than half."

"And serves you right." The copywriter softened his tone. "If you need the other five hundred, it's yours."

"I don't. I'm in excellent shape, as it happens. Oakwood Publishing has signed me to do a series of covers."

It was Peterson's turn to go for a round. When he came back, he took a lottery ticket from his pocket. Medway said, "Give it a scratch."

At the next table, a man had just lit a cigarette. Peterson stretched across and said, "May I borrow your lighter?" He accepted the implement, leaned back, snapped a flame, and ignited the ticket. He dropped it into the ashtray and they watched it burn.

Medway was bothered. "We'll never know what it was worth."

"It wasn't worth our friendship," Peterson said.

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THE JURY BOX
by JON L. BREEN

When the espionage craze of the Sixties was at its height, the claim was made that the spy novel would eventually displace the old-fashioned detective novel, the reason being that the single body in the library simply isn't enough to captivate the reader in our complex and troubled age. The fate of the world must be at stake in order to get the juices flowing. Happily, in the years since, the classical whodunit and the private-eye novel (both endangered species twenty years ago) have made strong comebacks, and the espionage tale claims a healthy but no longer dominant share of the crime-fiction market. A great deal of fine spy fiction continues to be published, and below are several recent examples.

That Brian Freemantle is one of the best and most devious plotters of spy thrillers is demonstrated both by the recently reprinted *See Charlie Run* (Bantam, $4.50), a surprising and suspenseful 1987 entry in the Charlie Muffin series concerning the proposed defection of a KGB assassin, and by the author's latest non-series effort.

**** Brian Freemantle: *Betrayals,* Tor, $18.95. Almost a year after losing her husband to cancer, Janet Stone, an Englishwoman living in Washington, D.C., meets and becomes engaged to John Sheridan, ostensibly a minor employee of the State Department. When he is posted to Beirut and vanishes (amid reports he was a CIA agent), she is so determined not to lose him, too, her only course is to go after him, despite advice to the contrary from all corners. This is a masterfully written and constructed novel that invites the reader to count the betrayals (literal and figurative) alluded to in the title.

*** Wayne Warga: *Fatal Impressions,* Arbor House/Morrow, $16.95. Book and art dealers Jeffrey Dean and Rachel Sabin, first met in the Shamus Award-winning *Hardcover* (1985), go from Los Angeles to that favorite locale for post-World War II spying, Berlin, in an adventure involving some forged Stella lithographs. The wealth of information on the art world and (to a lesser extent) the book business is the strongest feature of this readable travelogue mystery.

*** Raymond Obstfeld: *The Remington Contract,* Worldwide, $4.50. Cliff Remington, a domesticated former CIA agent, is called back to duty a la Matt Helm to help thwart Vatican Towne, code name Cronus, who is systematically freezing Fat Boy, the Agency's computer system. This is a wild, violent, sexy, often humorous free-world-hangs-in-the-balance thriller from a gifted storyteller. Obstfeld specializes in vividly kinky villains, but his good guys aren't bad, either.

*** Barbara Michaels: *Smoke*

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and Mirrors, Simon and Schuster, $17.95. The Senate campaign of a Virginia congresswoman provides the well realized background for the latest from one of the contemporary mystery novel's most accomplished and reliable producers, with or without her usual romantic-suspense label. Though there is no shortage here of either romance or suspense, the central puzzle is carefully and fairly clued in the classical manner.

*** Stephen Dobyns: *Saratoga Bestiary,* Viking, $16.95. Among contemporary sleuths, fifty-year-old Saratoga private eye Charlie Bradshaw, though certainly his own person, most closely resembles Bill Pronzini's Nameless. The title of his fifth case refers to the clients of a murdered bookmaker, each tagged with an animal name. Also involved is the theft for ransom of a painting of Man O' War. Poet Dobyns writes splendid prose, brings his characters to life, and builds a nicely involved plot.

*** K. K. Beck: *Unwanted Attentions,* Walker, $17.95. The versatile author best known for nostalgia mysteries like *Death in a Deck Chair* (1984) presents a tale that combines pure suspense, formal detection, and courtroom drama, doing a good job on all three. College professor Rebecca Kendall is accused of murdering Benjamin Knapp, an erotomaniac who has harassed her since their student days.

*** David Williams: *Treasure in Oxford,* St. Martin's, $15.95. Merchant banker Mark Treasure goes to summertime Oxford to chair a meeting of the Moneybuckle Endowment and investigates the murder of a book dealer who has discovered some sketches ostensibly the work of Constable. The author's customary sly humor and Dickensian character names accompany a clever puzzle plot.

Among the reprints are a pair for locked-room buffs, separated in original publication date by more than half a century. Carter Dickson's (i.e., John Dickson Carr's) *The Red Widow Murders* (International Polygonics, $4.95), a 1935 Sir Henry Merrivale case about a room that seemingly kills its occupants, is truthfully below-average Thirties Carr—but you'll be amazed at how terrific that can be. The impossible murder scene of Herbert Resnicow's intricate 1987 novel, *The Dead Room* (Worldwide, $3.50), is one presumably never employed by Carr: an anechoic chamber used by Hamilcar Hi-Fi to test new speakers. The father-and-son detective team of Ed and Warren Baer solve the cleverly constructed puzzle.

A hauntingly atmospheric Simenon novella first published in the United States in 1940, *Maigret and the Yellow Dog* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, $3.95), returns in a fresh and fluid 1987 translation by Linda Asher. Though Georges Simenon retired from fiction-writing several years ago, he was so prolific his publishers can still find good novels new to American readers, including *The Rules of the Game* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, $18.95), a 1955 non-Maigret (and essentially non-criminous) entry

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from the author's American period, in which Connecticut supermarket manager Walter Higgins confronts a personal crisis when blackballed for the second time from the country club.

Readers who favor the extremely difficult form of the comic mystery will be grateful to Countryman Press, which has brought back two more of Phoebe Atwood Taylor's durable Asey Mayo mysteries, *Spring Harrowing* (1939) and *The Deadly Sunshade* (1940), $5.95 each, while adding to their Foul Play Press stable Joyce Porter's most hilariously disgusting sleuth in his first two cases, *Dover One* (1964) and *Dover Two* (1965), $4.95 each.

For one of the most unusual pure whodunits in mystery annals, try Michael Gilbert's 1952 classic about murder in an Italian POW camp during World War II, *The Danger Within* (Perennial/Harper and Row, $3.95), possibly better known under its British title, *Death in Captivity*. Available from the same publisher at the same price are two more outstanding Gilbert novels, both involving substantial courtroom combat, *Death Has Deep Roots* (1951) and *Blood and Judgment* (1959).

For the commuter, a set of four audiocassettes presents the unabridged contents (less one story by Stanley Ellin) of the 1987 Mystery Writers of America anthology, *Murder on the Aisle* (Dove Books on Tape, 12711 Ventura Blvd., Suite 250, Studio City, CA 91604, $19.95), edited by Mary Higgins Clark. Celebrity readers David Birney, Arte Johnson, Perry King, Joan Rivers, and Roddy McDowell do a fine job on stories, mostly from *EQMM*, by Ron Goulart, Joyce Harrington, John F. Suter, Edward D. Hoch, William F. Nolan, Henry Slesar, Lawrence Treat, and others. Especially good is Johnson's reading of Thomas Adcock's powerful "New York, New York." In *Nightcrawlers: Stories from Blue World* (Simon and Schuster, $14.95), three of Robert McCammon's horror stories (highlighted by the shattering title story concerning a literally haunted Vietnam vet and "Night Calls the Green Falcon," a beautifully written and inventively constructed novelet about an aging movie-serial hero's encounter with real-life crime on the streets of Hollywood) are given expert readings by William Windom. The three-hour abridgment of M. E. Morris's *The Icemen* (Simon and Schuster, $14.95) provides an Antarctica-based Nazis-rise-again adventure of no particular originality but plenty of well paced and undemanding action to ease the pain of gridlock. David Purdham's reading, with strong vocal characterizations and a wide range of difficult accents, is outstanding.

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DETECTIVERSE

ANOTHER GRAVE TONE

by JAMES HOLDING

Here lie the bones of Austen Tate,
The governor of a southern state,
Whose love of power was so firm
He thought he'd try for a second term,
And setting his mind in that direction
Began campaigning for reelection.
The opposing party's candidate
Challenged Tate to a Great Debate
With TV coverage and all the rest
So voters could see which man was best.
Tate's rival used the Great Debate
To aim some nasty cracks at Tate—
Insulted him and frankly stated
That Tate was a governor outdated,
Which so enraged poor Governor Tate
That he couldn't wait to retaliate
And strangled his foe for all to see
Who followed politics on TV.
Governor Tate had his day in court
And his trial for murder was very short—
He was sentenced to death in record time
Since a million witnesses viewed his crime.
And Governor Tate found it most abhorrent
That he had to sign his own death warrant.

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"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

HUGH PENTECOST

We are sorry to tell you that this is the last story Judson Philips wrote—under any of his bylines. He died on March 7 at the age of 85 in Sharon, Connecticut. He had been ill for a long time with emphysema, but in spite of this and failing eyesight he continued to write. His last of over 100 novels, Pattern of Terror, *was published posthumously this spring by Carroll & Graf. EQMM has not enjoyed a better friend or a more loyal contributor . . .*

AN EYE FOR AN EYE

by HUGH PENTECOST

My father was murdered at about eight o'clock Wednesday morning on the front steps of his suburban home. On Monday my mother had received a letter threatening Dad's life and mine. My father was a captain in the city police force, and I had followed in his footsteps and become an officer in the detective bureau of the same police force. Captain Richard Mason had a brilliant record for bravery, especially in recent months when he was in charge of fighting the city's drug problems. He was much admired and liked by all his fellow officers. But someone hadn't liked him that Wednesday morning.The letter that my mother had received on Monday had been seen by my father, by me, and by the Police Commissioner, Jason Lord. It read:

Dear Madam,

Your husband was responsible for the death of men in my family. I want you to know that he and your son will pay for those murders with their own lives in the very near future. Happy Deathday—

An Eye for an Eye

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Dad didn't take it as seriously as he should have. "Crazy fool hopes I'll die of fear," he said.

Dad didn't die of fear. The killer had stood so close to him that there were powder marks from the gun on his face and neck. It was hard to understand how he could have let any stranger get that close under the circumstances. He had been warned, he had to be expecting violent trouble, and he had his own gun, which was never drawn. Butch Benson, the detective put in charge by the Commissioner, said it was almost as if the killer had been a friend Dad had no reason to suspect. Nobody in the neighborhood had seen anything or anyone. My mother had heard the shots and rushed to the window, and had seen nothing for a moment. Not until she went to the front door and opened it did she see him lying on the stone step. There was no sign of anyone else.

I'm not living at home these days. My time schedule in the detective bureau didn't coincide with Dad's. I have a room in a small hotel next to Headquarters. Commissioner Lord notified me of the tragedy just as I was having my breakfast coffee. Dad was my idol. I couldn't imagine a world without him. I've been trained to hunt down men like Dad's murderers, but Commissioner Lord ordered me to stay off the case.

"The killer obviously knows you by sight," he said. "You can't take a step anywhere, Mark, without the possibility of being in his sights. It isn't going to help us or square things for your father to have you rubbed out. Stay clear of it. I'll assign three men to cover you night and day."

"I can't stay out of it, Commissioner," I said. "Dad was my whole life. I've got to help square this for him."

"And then someone else gets to square for *his* father?" Lord said. " 'An Eye for an Eye'?"

I had no doubts, nor did the Commissioner or any man on the Force, about who was responsible for my father's murder. I'm not talking about the man who shot him face to face, but who that man represented.

Two months ago my father had been put in charge of fighting the drug traffic in the city. There was no secret about who ran the trade—the Gardella family. They were possibly Mafia, but there was no proof of that. But they were a bloody gang, violent enough to scare off anyone but the toughest opposition. My old man was just that—the toughest. On a summer afternoon about a month ago, he

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took a dozen cops to an old warehouse on the west side where he had been led to believe the Gardellas stored illegal drugs. When he and his men invaded the warehouse, there was no one there, but they found something like a million dollars' worth of heroin, cocaine, crack, and marijuana. They were packing it up to take it away when the Gardellas burst in and a gun battle erupted. Two policemen were fatally wounded, but the Gardellas were wiped out—Antonio, the known leader, his two brothers, Vincent and Salvatore, a son Louis, and two of Vincent's sons, Enrico and Carlo. Two unidentified hoods bit the dust with them.

"You've talked to your mother?" the Commissioner asked.

I nodded. "By telephone. She's shattered, of course. I said I'd be right out, but she urged me not to come, says it would be too dangerous out there. Gardella's people would be expecting me to do just that."

"She's right. Stay away from where you're expected to show up."

"Like here?" I asked bitterly.

"Here we can protect you," the Commissioner said. "There are an army of reporters out front talking with Butch Benson. They want to talk with you."

"I can't tell them anything," I said.

"Not about this morning," Lord said, "but your father must have talked to you in detail at the time of the Gardella wipeout. You're news to them, and they may know things about the Gardella mob that have escaped us."

There were about a dozen reporters in the outer office. Among them was a girl, Connie Stevenson, who works for *The City Times*. She'd done a lot to build up Dad as a hero at the time of the Gardella shooting. She'd been at the house to interview him and I'd met her there.

She came quickly over to me as the Commissioner and I came into the room.

"I'm so very sorry, Mark," she said, reaching out her hands to me. "Your father was such a great guy. I almost feel responsible for what happened to him."

"How?"

"I helped build him up as a hero. If I hadn't, he might have seemed just another cop." She took a sheet of paper out of her coat pocket and handed it to me. "This was in my mail this morning."

It was another letter.

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Dear Miss Stevenson,

You made a hero out of Captain Mason. When you get this, he will have paid for it. Your turn will come next, along with his son's.

Happy Deathday—
An Eye for an Eye

"Does Butch Benson know about this?" I asked her, showing the letter to the Commissioner.

"He knows."

Benson's voice interrupted us. He's a big redhead with a voice that can shake windows. "Now that Miss Stevenson's brought you up to date, let's try to work out a game plan."

The Commissioner looked up from the letter. "I'm having second thoughts about this," he said. "Your mother needs you, Mark. It will be easier to protect you at her house than here. The same killer is after you and Miss Stevenson. How would your mother feel about offering Miss Stevenson shelter? We can send you out there with guards, search the house from basement to attic, and then keep you surrounded. We may not spot the killer, but he won't be able to get to you. Do you have family here in the city, Miss Stevenson?"

"No," she said.

"Will you agree to take cover in the Mason home?"

I gave her arm a reassuring squeeze.

"Yes," she said. "If Mrs. Mason is willing."

The minute we stepped through the front door my mother's arms were around me. "Darling, darling, darling," she was whispering. Then she turned to Connie. "The Commissioner said you had a letter from the same monster I did."

Connie nodded.

My mother looked from her back to me. "So the same man might be coming here for both of you," she said.

"If he is, he'll have to bring an army," I said. "There are eight cops outside the house just as eager to nail him as we are."

"How is the Commissioner going about the investigation?" she asked.

"They're trying to find out who wrote the letters to you and Connie."

"Nobody's going to talk to the police," Mom said flatly. "Come on, have a drink while I put out some supper."

Butch Benson put his head in the door, and after expressing his

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sympathy to my mother he said, "Don't be upset if you hear some noise outside. We'll be changing the guard from time to time."

Mom had recognized the officers who had first arrived. "I hate to see Richard's men leaving us," she said.

"We're all his men," Butch reassured her. "We'd all give an arm and a leg to nail his killer."

After a light supper, Connie suddenly leaned forward and covered her face with her hands. "I'm suddenly so tired I can't believe it," she said.

"We all are," Mom said. "Come with me. Mark's room is made up. He'll sleep in his father's room."

They went off down the hall and I went back to thinking about Dad. We didn't have anything to lead us anywhere. It was easy enough to blame the Gardellas, but there weren't any Gardellas left, only non-family members of the syndicate. I was supposed to be a detective, but I couldn't think where to begin.

Soon my mother was back. "Why don't we try for some sleep ourselves?" she said. "The house is in good hands and the next few days aren't going to be easy."

I was surprised how good the idea of sleep sounded. I hugged her, went down the hall to my father's room, took off my shoes, and stretched out on the bed under the old quilted spread. I glanced at my watch before I dozed off. It was seven-thirty.

When I woke, it was after nine and deadly quiet. I put on my shoes and went down the hall to the living room. I stopped in the doorway, not believing what I saw. Mom was sitting on the couch and standing in front of her was Connie Stevenson, holding a deadly-looking handgun aimed at Mom's forehead.

"Would you believe it, Mark?" Connie said. "I found your mother going through my handbag?"

"Put down that gun," I said.

"Not until I've used it—on you *and* your mother," Connie said.

"There was a credit card in her bag made out to Constance Gardella," Mom said. "Tell us, Connie, were you the daughter of Antonio or Vincent or Salvatore, or were you the wife of one of the younger ones—Enrico, Carlo, or Louis?"

"Carlo was my man," Connie said, "and your husband killed him. It's your turn now—yours and Mark's."

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I saw her trigger finger start to contract and my blood turned to ice water.

"One more thing," Mom said. "When I checked out that gun, I took the trouble to unload it."

Connie pulled the trigger and there was a click. She stepped closer to Mom and I charged at her, bringing her down with a flying tackle that sent the gun across the floor.

Mom was up off the couch. "I'll get the police," she said with a smile, they being only a step or two away. She stopped and looked at Connie. "You must have blessed the Commissioner when he arranged for us to have you here."

Connie struggled against my hold and spat, first at my mother, then at me.

Mom's smile was bitter. "So the Gardella saga is over. An eye for an eye."

DETECTIVERSE

HARD CASE

by BONNIE RYAN-FISHER

He should have seen the dangers
In his life of crime,
But still he schemes new break-ins
While he's serving time.

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a *NEW* short story by

ANDREW VACHSS

"Vito, he don't know you like I do," the boss told the old man. "He's a young stallion. Wants his own crew, you know?"

A new short-short from Andrew Vachss, whose most recent novel, Blue Belle *(Knopf), Nicholas Pileggi calls "terrifying and more accurate than we would ever want it to be—Andrew Vachss writes about a criminal world where even wiseguys fear to tread . . ."*

COUGH

by ANDREW VACHSS

This business, I know how it goes, the old man thought to himself. He'd been at it a long time. Dead reliable, that's what they always said about him. He kept his thoughts to himself. Nothing showed on his face. The way it was supposed to be. The younger ones come in, take over. In business, you have to make room for new blood. The young ones, they think I don't know that. I know how they think. Cowboys.

He mused to himself, alone in his room. They wouldn't call me in, ask me to retire. I would have done it, they asked me. When you're done, you're done. But they don't know how to ask. No class. It's as if they *like* to do it. Only amateurs like to do it.

I was never one of them. Not a Family man—just a soldier, doing my work. They let *them* retire.

The old man was just back from Miami. The last of the bosses called him down there. The old man thought it was just another job.

"You always done right by us," the boss said.

The old man didn't say anything. He wasn't a talker. That used to be a good thing, he thought to himself, waiting.

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"Vito, he don't know you like I do. He's a young stallion. Wants his own crew, you know?"

The old man waited. For the boss to tell him about the retirement plan.

"They think you're past it. Spooking at shadows, hearing things—you understand what I'm telling you?" The boss puffed on his cigar. He wouldn't look the old man in the face. The old man got it then.

The old man didn't know anything about running. He had always lived in the same place, done the same things. Kept it nice and quiet. By himself.

When Vito called, they said they had a job for him in Cleveland. He knew it was time to show them he could still do it.

His flight was supposed to leave from LaGuardia at nine that night. I've been doing this forever—I know how it's done, he thought. They'll have a man on the plane with me. Take care of business in Cleveland. Sure.

He got to the airport at three in the afternoon. Stashed his carry-on bags in the coin lockers. Checked the schedules. Figured it would take about five trips through the scanners. Bought tickets for Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh. Different airlines. All departing from gates in the same corridor.

He went through the scanner, one of the pieces of the gun buried inside his carry-on. The X-ray machine would show an aerosol can of shaving cream. He left the bag inside, walked back out, patient, taking his time. The old way. The right way. By seven o'clock, he had all the pieces through the scanner. The last time through, he had a garment bag over his shoulder. In the men's room, he put the pieces together and stuffed the soft carry-on bags into the larger case. Then he sat down to wait.

The old man felt the other guy behind him. He didn't look. Smell of some aftershave he didn't recognize—one of those new ones. Like perfume. The old man heard him cough. A dry, hard cough with a liquid center. Like his lungs were getting ready to go. It was better than a photograph.

You have to be sure in this business, it's not a game, you only get one move, the old man repeated to himself. The catechism he learned as a youth. He switched to the no-smoking section on the other side of the departure lounge. The old man didn't catch a glimpse of him, but he heard the cough a few seats down. The young ones, they wouldn't pick up something like that. The old man was a pro.

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Eight-fifteen. The old man got up, heading for the men's room. He knew the shooter wouldn't let him out of his sight. They couldn't be sure he'd get on the plane like some tame old sheep.

Some punk was combing his hair at the sink when the old man went inside. He took the last stall, shut it behind him. Waited.

He heard the cough. In the stall right next to him. He stepped out, bent down quickly, checked under the door. The guy's pants were around his ankles. The place was empty. The old man walked out, letting the guy hear him, slipping gloves on his hands. Checked the door to the men's room. Kicked a little wood wedge underneath to give him a couple of seconds. All the time he'd need.

He stepped back into the last stall and stood on the toilet bowl. The guy was reading a newspaper. The old man put two slugs into the top of his head. Pop, pop. The silencer worked perfectly. He left the gun in the stall.

The old man was back in the departure lounge before they had the first call for boarding.

They'd hear about it. They'd know he wasn't past it. Not some old man who couldn't do the job. He lit a cigarette—the way you do when a job is over.

Then he heard the cough.

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a *NEW* short story by

DONALD OLSON

Precisely why this dazzling young man should have captured her interest and inflamed the long-banked fires of her imagination was proving as deep a mystery to Daphne as did the very presence of such a vital creature among Crestview's faceless widows and widowers and couples in various stages of decrepitude. Perhaps it was the mystery itself that awakened her curiosity, made her aware for the first time in weeks of life beyond the shuttered windows of her own bruised ego . . .

THE MALICE OF CUPID

by DONALD OLSON

"Daphne? You in bed?"

"Yes, I'm in bed. With Charles."

"Ohh—"

"Dickens!"

"Gosh, for a minute I thought maybe—"

"Don't be stupid, Myra. It's almost midnight, what do you want?"

"About tomorrow, Daph, won't you reconsider? I can pick you up, you can borrow George's clubs—"

"Myra, picture my lips. Read them. Nothing could induce me to trail around a dew-drenched prairie at dawn with a gaggle of inept female *golfers*."

"Daph, you've got to do *some*thing. You can't just sit there in that apartment brooding about Charlie."

"Charlie who?" retorted Daphne acidly. "Good night, Myra. Sweet dreams. I'll call you."

But don't hold your breath, she added silently, leaving *Bleak House* on the floor where it had slipped as she'd reached for the

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phone. Thanks to dear Myra she would need more than a book to put her to sleep. Damn Myra and her persistent good intentions. Damn Charlie for turning her into a depressive pill freak. Damn Mama for having lived too long. "You deserve a life of your own, Daph. Your mother would love Queen Manor. You could visit her every day."

Yes, ten years ago Myra's advice might have been worth heeding. Of course, had Daphne followed that advice she wouldn't have met Charlie in the waiting room at General while his father and her mother were having their weekly therapy treatments. The friendship had ripened. Nursing arrangements allowed them to spend Sundays together for leisurely dinners, rides in the country, a movie if the weather was bad. They'd reached an understanding: as soon as possible, once they were both free—

Coincidentally, freedom arrived for them both within a two-month period after they'd known each other almost three years. Release from filial obligations, however, had affected Charlie in a way Daphne had never anticipated. Within a month he had dumped Daphne and begun a series of exuberant affairs with younger women. Coupled with the effect of her mother's death, Charlie's heartless betrayal had left Daphne in a state of chronic despondency from which neither her own will nor the efforts of a few close friends—teachers with whom she had worked before giving up her career to take care of her mother—seemed able to rescue her.

Perhaps her worst mistake had been to sell the house and move into Crestview Estates at the edge of the city. There, among strangers, with nothing to occupy her time but perfunctory household chores and her books, her sense of isolation grew more acute, the paralysis of will more enervating. Possibly a pet—a cat or dog or even a parakeet— some living presence might have softened the ache of her loneliness, but Crestview didn't allow pets and she had no desire to become acquainted with her fellow tenants, felt not the slightest curiosity about them.

Until one afternoon as she stood looking moodily down from her window, half wishing it were high enough from the ground to kill her if she were to jump, she saw *him*.

"I couldn't possibly, Myra. I have plans."
"Like what?"
"A previous engagement," she lied.
"Who with, your dentist?"

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"You've got the gender right."

"Daph! You've met someone! Didn't I tell you Crestview was just the place for you? What's his name? What's he look like?"

" 'The Sun, in human limbs arrayed.' "

"*What?*"

"Byron."

"His name's Byron?"

"I was *quoting,* idiot. Listen, I see him coming. I'll call you."

Daphne had just time to snatch up the mother-of-pearl opera glasses and press them to her eyes as the vintage white Cadillac with its noisy muffler passed beneath her window, circled the grassy median strip separating the two buildings of the Crestview complex, and parked in front of the garden apartment directly opposite. The driver stepped from the car, wearing as usual only those tight-fitting jeans and a gold necklet flashing in the sun against his muscular brown throat.

"The god of life, and poetry, and light, the Sun in human limbs arrayed." Precisely why this dazzling young man should have captured her interest and inflamed the long-banked fires of her imagination was proving as deep a mystery to Daphne as did the very presence of such a vital creature among Crestview's faceless widows and widowers and couples in various stages of decrepitude. Perhaps it was the mystery itself that awakened her curiosity, made her aware for the first time in weeks of life beyond the shuttered windows of her own bruised ego.

That the young man might have stirred some latent erotic response Daphne would have vigorously denied as being grossly preposterous. Sunbathing on a beach towel on the willow-shaded lawn alongside his building, the young man provoked merely the same visual excitement, she would have insisted, as did those two black horses she could see grazing on a hillside pasture if she raised the mother-of-pearl opera glasses above the screen of willow trees, a pleasing impression of figures in a lushly painted bucolic landscape. Clad in khaki trunks that offered a minimal concession to respectability and gave the impression at first glance that he was quite naked, the young man evoked memories of those pagan heroes in Greek mythology, her favorite childhood reading—an interest encouraged by her father, a classical scholar who had bestowed upon her the name Daphne.

Daphne and Apollo. The fancy amused her, even if he was hardly more than a boy and she on the shady side of forty. And so Apollo

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became the name by which she referred to him in her thoughts. One of her fondest ambitions had been to visit the Greek islands with Charlie after they were married. She still kept her collection of colorful travel brochures. Paper promises. Charlie's weren't even that. So now, adrift between the barren past and as seemingly hopeless a future, Daphne found herself creating her own private Grecian idyll, if not from the porthole of a gleaming cruise ship at least from the window overlooking that patch of sun-washed lawn bordered by willow trees beyond which she could imagine a blue Aegean dotted with rocky temple-crowned islands.

Eventually the mystery of Apollo's unlikely presence was partially solved for her through the unwanted acquaintance of two other women living in her building—silver-haired Rose, a refugee from the urban terrors of The Bronx, and Winnie, who Daphne called Whiney because of the woman's relentlessly boring account of her domestic woes preceding what she wryly referred to as her "well earned widowhood." As they spent almost every afternoon in lawn chairs outside the entrance, Daphne found it impossible to avoid them and not always easy to escape.

"Someone ought to complain to the manager about that noisy muffler," Rose remarked. The white Cadillac had just driven off.

"She might at least have paid to have it fixed before flying off," agreed Winnie.

"Oh?" Daphne adopted a mildly curious tone. "I assumed he lived there alone."

"Golden Boy? It's not *his* apartment."

The two women proceeded to explain that a Mrs. Inez Rasmussen had moved into the garden apartment less than a year ago, having sold her house after the death of her well-to-do husband. Shortly afterward, she had gone on a tour to Hawaii and California, returning one day in the vintage Cadillac chauffeured by this auburn-haired Adonis. A few days before Daphne herself had moved in, the widow Rasmussen had gone away again, this time, so Rose and Winnie had somehow learned, on a tour of Europe alone, leaving the young man behind in her apartment.

"Perhaps he's her son—or a nephew?" Daphne politely suggested, at which both women raised indignant eyebrows.

Said Rose: "You'd have to be hopelessly naive not to guess what the relationship is. *They* certainly made no bones about it. All those

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twilight strolls into the park across the street, hand in hand. Why, she's old enough to be his mother."

Daphne, trying to form a mental picture of Inez Rasmussen, asked if she was pretty. Rose merely shrugged. Winnie said, "Oh, well, not *un*attractive. She has beautiful eyes, but her figure's nothing to rave about. As a matter of fact, my dear, she looks rather like you." As if conscious of having given offense, she quickly added: "Oh, but older, of course."

Rose laughed. "I do hope he's enjoying *his* vacation. Though he never seems to do anything but wash the car and lie around showing off his physique or wandering around the park for hours at a stretch."

That malicious gossip should have cast that godlike creature with the clay feet of a gigolo might have been expected to alter Daphne's vision of pagan innocence, and yet she found something wrong with the picture—an inconsistency she couldn't quite explain as she studied the copper-gilt figure of her young Apollo sprawled with virile grace on the lawn. Perhaps if music had poured from the window of the garden apartment or if he had brought girls home with him in the noisy Cadillac or if he had not remained so visibly alone, her vision of an Arcadian idyll might have been disturbed. As it was, she found herself sympathizing with the young man in his solitude, choosing to regard him as no less a victim of Cupid's malice than she was herself. Although obviously he had not been cast off as heartlessly as Charlie had cast her off or he wouldn't be occupying the apartment.

Though hardly a secret of his supple young body had not been revealed to her eyes, what of his personality? What was he like? What did he think about as he basked in the hot summer sun? Daphne found herself hungering for the sound of his voice, as if that might reveal some clue to his solitary nature.

A few yards from the trash dumpster, a water hose was provided for the tenants' car washing, and what could be more natural, Daphne decided as she stood at the window late one morning watching Apollo hose down the Cadillac, than for her to offer a polite good morning to the young man if she just happened to carry her trash bag down now? Unless he were totally to ignore her, it might present the opportunity to engage in a few moments' enlightening conversation.

He was in the process of drying the car with an old towel and didn't glance her way as she paused a few feet from him after de-

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positing her trash in the dumpster. With a timid smile, she said brightly, "You have a beautiful car and take such good care of it."

He looked around with not quite a scowl on his comely face, and she discovered that his eyes were that palely translucent blue more vividly arresting than the deeper violet shades.

"Try to," he said brusquely, and his voice was as deep as she had imagined. He returned to his task, leaving Daphne feeling gauche and frustrated, but incapable of moving away.

"You have a beautiful day for it," she remarked.

At this, he looked toward her again, but with an unmistakably impertinent smile. "And for *bird*-watching?"

Color flooded her cheeks as his glance moved knowingly from her face straight up to the window of her apartment. The shock of realizing she had been wrong in assuming he'd been unaware of her spying left her speechless with embarrassment. Recovering, she had the wit to reply briskly: "Oh, no—birds don't interest me. I love to watch those horses up there on the hill. Have you seen them?"

He slowly folded the damp towel and rubbed it lazily across the broad expanse of his naked chest, a gesture Daphne found disconcertingly sensuous. "Like horses, do you?" he asked with that same ambiguous smile.

"I'm afraid they rather intimidate me, except at a distance. When I see them up there, silhouetted against the sky, I think of a line from a poem I've always liked. 'Once, whatever else you leave undone, once ride a wild horse into the sun.' " Whereupon, fearing to see a dull gleam of contempt or incomprehension on his face, she turned abruptly and walked away from him back to the safety of her building.

That brief exchange was hardly the revealing dialogue she had hoped to encourage. It answered none of her questions. Only if she were able to contrive a meeting away from the curious gaze of all those windows in the complex could she hope to engage him in a real conversation. Then it occurred to her that such an opportunity might present itself if she were to encounter him, presumably by accident, during one of his rambles in the park.

The broad stretch of parkland lying across the highway from Crestview separated the western outskirts of the city from the open farmland beyond. A narrow lane shaded by feathery-leaved locust trees marked the eastern perimeter of the park. It was into this lane

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that Daphne ventured to follow the young man at a discreet distance one afternoon shortly after the abortive encounter in the drive.

As she reached the top of a knoll, she spotted his brown figure moving not as she had expected into the park itself, with its benches and picnic tables and tennis court, but through a broad field of tall, waving grass lying between the park and an area of dense woodland. He was advancing slowly across the field, occasionally stooping to brush the grass aside as if looking for wild strawberries, the fragrance of which hung sweetly upon the hot summer air. Screened from view behind a copse of young alders, Daphne waited until he had crossed the field and vanished from sight into the woods before resuming her pursuit.

She came to a deeply rutted path, evidently made by dirt bikes, leading into the woods through a break in the trees where she had seen him disappear. As she progressed cautiously along this path, the enveloping stillness within the woods, where only narrow shafts of sunlight pierced the deepening gloom, began to have a disquieting effect on her nerves.

Common sense told her she was behaving like a moonstruck schoolgirl. What would Myra think if she could see her now? What sort of humiliating situation was she deliberately blundering into? Still, she found herself incapable of turning back—even when the sudden violent protest of a crow flapping out of the underbrush caused her heart to pound as if it might explode.

By now she was at the edge of a clearing revealing traces of an old campfire, the surrounding area strewn with crumpled beer cans and plastic bags. Here she paused, listening for the telling rustle of leaves and snapping of twigs, wondering what she would do if he were suddenly to appear. What could she say? How could she explain? What madness had possessed her to follow him into this melancholy, airless wood, where the brooding silence of the trees seemed to mock her folly?

She was in fact on the point of turning back when her eye fell upon a once stately maple tree lying just beyond the clearing—evidently, from the blackened gash near its uptorn roots, cut down by lightning. Her courage returned as an idea came to her. She could rest on the trunk of the fallen tree and listen for his return before retreating slowly, along the path, allowing *him* to catch up to *her*. He need never suspect that she had been following him. Cheered by the cleverness of this strategy, she sat down on the trunk, patted her face dry with her handkerchief, and waited . . .

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Alert for the sound of his approach, taking it for granted he would return by this same path, she had been sitting there for about five minutes when her gaze, exploring a clump of maidenhair fern crushed beneath the branches of the fallen tree, caught what appeared to be a tiny glint of gold. Curious, she stooped to pull the branches aside, assuming the object was just another discarded beer can.

A moment later she was holding in her hands a woman's expensive, if somewhat damp and soiled, leather handbag, the shiny brass clasp of which had attracted her eye. Only when she had opened the bag and examined its contents—driver's license, passport, airline ticket to Paris, book of travelers' checks—did her heart begin to pound as wildly as when the crow had startled her into panic. She was staring down at the photograph on the driver's license, so utterly bemused by this extraordinary discovery and what to make of it, she didn't hear the footsteps that might have alerted her.

"Where'd you find it?"

Daphne opened her mouth, but couldn't utter a sound. Mutely, she pointed down at the tangled branches. He moved forward and snatched the bag roughly from her hand. She could smell the sweat on his body, almost feel its animal warmth. A consuming weakness spread through her limbs.

"You've been spying on me. Who are you?"

"No! No, you don't understand!"

"Watching me. Following me. Why?"

"I don't know—I don't know." Which was the truth, so far as her conscious mind permitted her to understand her own actions.

"You're a friend of hers."

"No! My name is Daphne King. I don't know her. I don't know—anyone."

He assumed a faintly sneering expression of disbelief. "You opened it. You know it's hers."

"I don't know anything about her. I've never seen her. I only know what they said."

"They?"

"Rose and Winnie. In my building."

"What did they say?"

"Only that she was abroad and you were staying in her apartment."

The tension biting into her nerves tightened even as that first wave of panic receded. It was all too unreal. He kept turning the

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bag over and over in his hands. "God, I don't believe this," he said. "All the lousy hours I've spent combing these woods. I knew it had to be here. And *you* have to find it. *You*. You practically trip over the damn thing."

In a scarcely audible tone, as if the ghostly stillness of the woods had crept into her voice, she said, "That's why you've stayed? To look for it?"

Just as softly, but with a note of bitter vindictiveness, he said, "She suddenly laid it on me. She was ditching me. Giving me a few bucks and buying my ticket back to the Coast. We were walking through the park that night and she dumps it on me with no warning. After all her promises!"

It wasn't so much the words, blurted out with the reckless candor of an angry child, that betrayed to Daphne some terrible flaw in his personality. It was something in those pale-blue eyes, something frightening. Whatever it was, had Inez Rasmussen discovered it?

"She's not in Europe, is she?"

He might not have heard her. His attention seemed focused on the bag as if it held some morbid fascination for him. "I tried to talk sense to her but she wouldn't listen. She laughed! I put my hands around her neck. She broke away. She didn't yell or scream, she just ran away from me, across the field into the woods here. But I caught her. And then it was easy. It was so dark, not even a moon. I didn't notice the bag was missing until I was burying her down in the gorge." He laughed. "I thought it would be a cinch to find it."

Even if she'd found the strength of will, Daphne knew it would do no good to cry for help, to try to escape. She knew he couldn't let her escape. "Now you have it," she said, straining to appear calm. "You can destroy it. You can go away."

He looked at her as if she were making fun of him. "Oh, sure—just like that, eh? Go away. And what about you?"

"Me?"

"Don't play dumb, Daphne."

"I don't even know your name. I didn't know her. It has nothing to do with me."

"You'd talk."

As if she'd known what she was going to say from the very moment she'd seen the woman's photograph on the license, the words poured out:

"It's all there in the bag. Her ticket to Paris—it can be changed. Her passport, her license, everything. She even looked a bit like

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me—Winnie herself said so." Unthinkingly, she reached forth to touch his arm. "I don't belong here. I have to get away. Why not Paris?" And after Paris, Greece. A rapturous vision of blue sea, white islands, ruined temples, and brown bodies flashed across her teeming brain. "There will be proof she arrived. And then somewhere over there she'll simply disappear. Vanish without a trace. Oh, please, don't look at me like that. I'm not crazy. I *do* understand. Someone I loved very much deserted me. Made promises and then betrayed me."

The rush of her thoughts left her dizzy. Her eyes looked wildly into his.

"Daphne, you are crazy."

Her voice rose, shattering the stillness of the woods. "So what if I am? What does it matter?"

She was only dimly conscious of his dropping the bag to the ground and moving closer, so close she could feel his breath on her cheek. His eyes shone in the gloom with an animal brightness. She trembled as he raised his arms and ran his hands lightly, almost caressingly over her shoulders. His fingers touched her face, her neck. The intimacy of the contact left her breathless. She closed her eyes as a blinding awareness of being on the brink of some momentous discovery about herself filled her with a sense almost of ecstasy.

The strong fingers moved across her flesh with a curious indecisiveness of touch as if awaiting some signal from the brain before increasing their pressure.

To strangle? Or embrace?

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DEPARTMENT OF FIRST STORIES

Twenty-five-year-old Onnie Granados' first success as a writer was in the fourth grade, when a limerick he wrote was printed in the school paper. He has worked as a bicycle mechanic, a theater ticket seller, a microfilm labeler, and a telecine operator, and is currently a radio/TV/film major at San Jose (California) State University. One of his writing instructors there, novelist, playwright, and short-story writer Craig Strete ("The First Bow," EQMM, May 1976), was kind enough to send "The Idea-of-the-Month Club" to us, recommending it for EQ's Department of Firsts.

Luke Deveraux didn't know what the scam was, but his curiosity was piqued. The return card asked a lot of nosy questions, but it didn't ask for money, so he figured that the worst that could happen would be having his name placed on another mailing list . . .

THE IDEA-OF-THE-MONTH CLUB

by ONNIE GRANADOS

My wife organizes our garage the way she organizes everything in her life. No random elements. Cold, clean precision. Me, I've always been more of a spontaneous, creatively messy sort of person. That probably explains why my books got on the bestseller list, why my wife left, and why I'm digging around this damned garage in the first place.

Not too long ago I was making a marginal living as a freelancer, a fiction writer, usually getting published in magazines you find in the back of the rack. I've written more "true life" love-slave stories than you've had fantasies. It may not have been literature, but it

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kept my checks from bouncing. At the time, my wife wasn't objecting to the fact that *Vampire Hookers from Venus* helped pay for the Volkswagen.

I wasn't close to rich but I was kind of a celebrity at writers' conventions in town, mostly because I was the only published writer in town. One day while attending one of these events (I attended quite a few—my wife thought it was good for my image), I managed to get interviewed by a local TV station.

The reporter kept calling me Dave, which is not my name, and asked the standard questions, like did I have any advice for struggling writers. I gave the standard answers, like keep trying, have patience, don't get discouraged—the usual line. Then she asked me where I got the ideas for my stories.

"I belong to the idea-of-the-month club," I joked. That's all it took to start all this.

We talked for a while after that, though she never did get my name right. But the letter I received three days later got my name perfectly.

It was addressed to Luke Deveraux. There was no return address. Inside was a cleanly typed letter. Embossed in gold at the top was the stylish logo of The Idea-of-the-Month Club. The letter said:

"Dear Mr. Deveraux:

"It has been brought to our attention that you have proclaimed yourself a member of our organization. We have no record of you ever joining the club. Please refrain from using our name in connection with your writing. However, if you are interested in becoming a charter, please fill out and return the enclosed form."

Now this was a new one. I didn't know what the scam was, but my curiosity was piqued. The return card asked a lot of nosy questions, but it didn't ask for money (it didn't even need a stamp), so I figured that the worst that could happen would be that I'd have my name placed on another mailing list. I filled it out, signed my name, and dropped it in the mailbox.

Three weeks later, having forgotten all about it, I was on my way to the store for spaghetti and to see if a story of mine had appeared in that month's issue of *Torrid Romance* when I stopped to check our mailbox. In it was another plain white envelope addressed to me. I tore it open and read:

"Dear Mr. Deveraux:

"We are pleased to announce that you have been accepted into

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The Idea-of-the-Month Club. We hope this will be of mutual benefit for everyone.

"The club works like this: Every month we will send you one idea for a short story, novel, or screenplay. How you choose to use this idea is completely up to you.

"Each idea has been thoroughly tested in our research department and is guaranteed to produce results.

"You pay nothing up front. Our fee is based on a percentage of the monies you receive from the sale of your completed manuscript. How this amount is calculated and collected is detailed on the accompanying chart.

"Remember, all correspondence with the club is completely confidential. We look forward to working with you.

The Idea-of-the-Month Club"

In the envelope with the letter were two other pages—the payment chart and a sealed card with "This month's idea for Luke Deveraux" written on it. Assuming that this thing was legitimate, and the idea was at all workable, it might be nice for some side money. I unfolded the card.

The idea was good. Actually, it was great. It was such a stunner that I never went to get the spaghetti. I ate a ham sandwich and spent the night and many subsequent days at my typewriter.

I sold the book. I'm sure you've heard of it, if not read it—*Shine On, Mason-Dixon, Shine On*. It was on the bestseller list for thirty-eight weeks.

Suddenly I was in the big time. I made more in royalties in four months than I'd made in seven years as a freelancer. And in the time it took for that book to get printed and on the stands, I was sent nine more ideas from the club. I sat at my desk, day after day, typing until I'd practically worn off my fingerprints. In one year I wrote two novels and seven short stories. The stories appeared in magazines you find in the *front* of the rack, and the novels were sold at dollar values usually only spent on military aircraft.

I discovered I was sending no small number of checks to the club. It was a lot of money, but I didn't care—I still netted over seven figures for my last novel and wasn't too concerned with the exact dollar count. I was content to write and let Susan, my wife, take care of the finances. It seemed like a good idea at the time.

Then one day, while eating lunch, I went through the mail and found another letter from the club. I wasn't expecting one—the next

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idea wasn't due for three weeks. Wondering, I opened it. The note was curt.

"Dear Mr. Deveraux:

"The enclosed check was returned by your bank. We don't know why. We do know, however, that should this matter not be resolved within one week, your membership will be terminated."

In the envelope with the letter was the last check I'd sent them, stamped by the bank PAYMENT DENIED.

I couldn't understand it. There was more than enough in our checking account to cover it. I was just about to call the bank when my wife walked in.

"Fan mail?" she asked, sitting down across from me. I quickly folded the letter.

"Not exactly. More like a bill. Seems I bounced a check."

"That wouldn't be from TIOTMC, would it?" There was the edge of a smile on her face.

"What?"

"The Idea-of-the-Month Club. That's who your checks are made out to, right?" Her smile vanished. "Who are they? Or it?"

"Just what the hell did you do, Susan?" I asked, starting to get hot under the collar.

"This isn't just your money, you know," she answered. "God knows how long I've put up with your so-called 'literary' career." She shook her head, a disgusted look on her face. "To think that in college I thought you might become another Hemingway or Faulkner or Steinbeck. At least now you're bringing in enough money to make it worthwhile. Maybe in time some talent may actually surface."

"It'll surface sooner than you think," I said, counting to ten. "Watch how stylishly I sign my name to the divorce papers."

"You think you're a real wit, don't you," she said, her eyes narrowing. "But you're not that smart. In case you couldn't figure it out, I had the bank alter our checking account. Now we *both* have to sign our names for a check to clear."

"You— How dare you tell me what to do with my money?"

"*Your* money?" She laughed contemptuously. "I've waited too long to let you spend it on anything you want. I'm finally getting what's been coming to me for staying with a loser like you all these years, and I'm not about to give it up." She shot me one last sneer and left the room.

All I could do was sit there, livid. Could she really have finessed our bank account to control my money like that? A quick call to the

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bank confirmed it. I sat holding the phone, my mind reeling. What could I do?

Nothing, I found out. Without my checks coming in, the club stopped sending me ideas. In the ten months following that day I couldn't even write a grocery list. I had a writer's block as solid as the Washington Monument.

I soon began to realize how fragile my mark as a writer was. My display space at the local bookstore was taken over by an exercise book. No one phoned for interviews, not even the local UHF station. I found a copy of *Shine On, Mason-Dixon, Shine On* in the dollar bin at the corner drugstore.

The one good thing that happened was that Susan finally left.

"You're really going?" I asked.

"For now," she said, loading her bags in the car. "Let's just call it an extended vacation." She looked at me as she slid in behind the wheel. "I've heard the Bahamas are particularly enjoyable this time of year. Don't you think it was smart of me to put half of your money into my own personal account?" She smiled with no humor. "You can't hold out much longer, Luke. You think you're hurting me by not writing, by not making any money, but it won't work. You'll only end up broke, and I'll still own half the reprint rights to your books. Think about it, dear." With that, she revved the engine and took off, leaving me in a cloud of smoke.

I finally reached the breaking point. I wrote to the club, explaining what had happened, begging them to take me back. I had to write something to keep from collapsing. Before long, the reply arrived.

"Dear Mr. Deveraux:

"We're happy to welcome you back into the club. You're one of our best and brightest members, and we were sorry to lose you.

"In your letter to us you detailed your difficulties regarding your wife. You may find it comforting to know that this is not a unique occurrence among our members. We have some idea of what you are going through and we are willing to postpone future payments until you have settled your problem. This is why the enclosed idea has been approved for you despite your inability to pay at this time. We hope it will serve as an inspiration to return to your profession and share your talents with us.

"We look forward to hearing from you in the future.

The Idea-of-the-Month Club"

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With trembling fingers, I tore open the envelope. Reading it, I realized it would be my greatest success ever. In fact, I even wished Susan was there, to see her reaction when I told her about it.

The idea is about this guy. He's brilliant, he's famous, he's wealthy—he's got it all. But then it starts to go. He loses his touch. His savings are spent. His wife takes off. It's all too much for the guy. He breaks down. When his wife decides to come home, he freaks out and brutally murders her.

The cops take him away and it hits the media: Bestselling writer goes bonkers, kills wife, and is acquitted due to insanity plea. Suddenly the focus is back on him. He goes to a shrink. He appears on TV, recovered, talking about his loss of control and subsequent reform and salvation. He writes a book—the working title is *Hack Writer,* but I may change that—and it's a doozy. It's a megahit. It gets translated everywhere. It becomes a TV mini-series.

Did I mention that Susan phoned from the Bahamas yesterday to say she's on her way home? Did I tell you this new book is to be nonfiction? I'm so excited about the idea, I can't wait to get started. But where did she put that damned axe?

DETECTIVERSE

FOILED—AND FOILED AGAIN

by RUBY HORANSKY

She married a bearded old critter,
But longed for a life full of glitter—
So she poisoned his tea,
But failed badly when he
Wouldn't drink it because it was bitter.

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a new Yukon story in verse . . .

BROTHERS

by JOHN DOBBYN

They used to make jokes, all the boys in the bar—
Oh, I know that they meant him no harm—
But behind his big grin there was pain in his eyes,
And to end it I'd give my right arm.
My brother and me, we came north from St. Joe
To run traps 'fore the Yukon got tame—
He was normal back then, and the size of two men,
With a heart 'bout as big as his frame.
I loved that old cuss, and the best part for us
Was the freedom to roam as we will
Through a wild icy realm only God could create,
Where the world is froze breathless and still.
We learned to track beaver and seals through the ice
And to steer by the great Northern Lights
From the Eskimo nomads who'd treat us like gods
'Cause they still had no fear of the whites.
They told us of valleys locked off by the ice
And the old ones would always insist
They'd seen beaver with pelts that were white as the snow,
Though God knows if they really exist.
My brother was kind of an overgrown kid
And the thought of those pelts drove him mad—
He'd have gone it alone, and I couldn't have that,
So we sold every pelt that we had
And bought us some dogs that were bred to survive
Where a polar bear'd freeze in the womb—
We set out on a quest that I wish we'd forgot,
And we mushed into God's icy tomb.
The tale of that trek is a nightmare and more—
Even now it brings pain to recall

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How we lost, one by one, every dog that we had.
But that wasn't the worst of it all.
We came too close to death just to walk away clean—
Things could never get back where they'd been.
We got out with our lives, but my brother'd been broke—
He was never quite nórmal again.

By the time we were physically good as we'd get,
It was clear that our wild days were done—
My brother Bill's brain wasn't up to the games
That are played by the ice, wind, and sun,
He had lost all the feeling in both of his hands,
And his fingers were rigid as wood;
The feeling was slow to come back to the palms
But the fingers were stone-cold for good.
We moved to the south, to a town that sprang up
Like so many when Gold was the cry,
And got into the business of dealing in furs
With the trappers who used to come by.
To sleep under a roof and to live in four walls—
Well, to tell you the truth, it was hell
For two wind-driven spirits whose roof was the stars,
But we tried, and the business did well.
I guess, looking back, we had three peaceful years—
Like they say, God just filled up our cup—
But it came to be clear that I'd have to go south
To look after some things that came up.
I hated the thought, 'cause it meant leaving Bill
And I wasn't quite sure he could cope,
But an offer came through that I couldn't refuse
And I figured there might be some hope.
A wrinkled old cuss with the nickname of "Doc"
Had an office for peddling pills—
No one knew if he had a license to trade,
But he treated most everyone's ills.
He had taken a shine to this brother of mine,
Always kind though my brother was slow,
So when I had to leave it was Doc who came through
With a promise to keep him in tow.
With that put to rest, I lit out for the west,
To the coast and a ship to the States.

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I was plagued by the thought of my brother alone,
So I booked on the earliest dates—
Still, the journey was long and the meetings were slow—
It took weeks just to get the right deals.
By the time I mushed back through the last hundred miles,
The winter was hard on my heels.

You know how you sometimes can feel in your bones
A chill that you can't quite explain?
Just as soon as I drove past the outskirts of town,
I could sense it was under a strain.
From the men in the street to the girls by the bar,
Even kids that came up to so high,
There wasn't a one, as I drove down the street,
That could look me quite straight in the eye.
I drove straight to the man on the far side of town
Where we stabled the sled and the team—
Even Charlie, our friend, came on cold as a clam.
It was crazy—like some kind of dream.
He mumbled some stuff about feeding the dogs,
And I said, "Dang it, Charlie, hold on,
I come back to this town after two months away
And you all seem to wish I'd stayed gone."
"It ain't you," mumbled Charlie, "I guess you ain't heard—
Been a killin' that's got us undone.
Good old Doc, he was shot with a Colt .44
And the thing is, it's your brother's gun."
"You know better than that," was 'bout all I could say
'Cause it hit me like two ton of lead.
"Where's he now?" "He lit out for the north with a team—
We ain't seen him since Doc was found dead."
I kept trying to puzzle it out in my mind, but I couldn't—
My mind seemed to block.
The one thing I knew just as God is my judge,
My brother could never hurt Doc.
"Did you rent him a team? Did he say he'd be back?
Can you just give me someplace to start?"
"Well," old Charlie said, "it was no team of mine, and
Ya know, that's not the funniest part—
He came by just before this whole business came up,
'Cause we used to be sort of good friends,

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And he tells me he's heard where some white beaver run
Way up north where the Bear Claw Ridge ends.
The next day he was gone—he was seen drivin' north
And that mornin' the word's around town
That old Doc has been killed and his place has been robbed
And your brother's old gun's on the ground."
My dogs needed rest, and I needed it, too,
But I guess it was not in the dice.
I knew where he went, and I'd rather be sent
Down to hell for a bucket of ice.
Those old ridges were treacherous, even in spring,
And with winter now well underway
I'd be lucky to make it back safely myself—
With my brother, there'd be hell to pay.
I laid in supplies that I'd need for the trip
And before I turned in for the night,
I dropped in for a chat with the Mountie in town
And it nearly turned into a fight.
He was stuck on the notion my brother'd killed Doc—
He was fixing to go bring him in.
I told him my brother and Doc were good friends,
But it seemed there was no way to win.
'Til I finally mentioned a fact that struck home
And I had him on our side at last—
There was no way my brother could squeeze off a round
With those fingers as stiff as a cast.
I figured that one of the trappers that camped
By the creek at the edge of the town
Had probably tried to rob Doc and been caught
And he panicked and shot old Doc down,
Then he fed my poor brother that white-beaver tale,
And he gave him a sled and a team.
When my brother lit out, he could lay blame on him,
And my brother played into his scheme.
If we found who it was that provided the dogs
For the goose-chase my brother was on,
Then we'd have us the killer and that would be that,
So I packed up to mush out at dawn.

For a man who had half of the sense God gave geese,
This whole trip was an idiot's trek—

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Just inhaling the gusts of the fresh winter blasts
Felt like splinters of glass in the neck.
After three weeks, I'd moved to the crest of the ridge
At the northernmost tip of the chain—
If the furies of winter were vicious below,
At the top they could triple the pain.
Though we both took a beating—the dogs and myself—
I needed the height for the view
Of the region below where I figured he'd be,
It's the best that I thought I could do.
After three days of mushing that murderous crest,
Almost bled of the last drop of hope,
I thought that I spotted a speck in the snow,
On the face of a far-distant slope.
It was instinct, not reason, that now set the pace—
I could feel the lash making demands
That the dogs couldn't meet, but I couldn't let up,
'Cause my brother's life lay in my hands.
The couple of hours of sunlight had passed,
And only the moon and the stars
Were left for the dogs to pick paths in the snow
Between icy crevasses and bars.
By a miracle, God brought us through to the dawn
And, although they survived the terrain,
The pace was too much for a few of the dogs,
'Cause their hearts seemed to burst with the strain.
I cut loose the traces wherever they dropped
And pushed on with the dogs that hung on—
Every loss made it tougher on those that were left,
And their will to survive was near gone.
I was practically paralyzed—running on nerves—
But each time that I'd look up ahead,
There was no sign of movement, and that was the drive
To press on when my muscles were dead.

It was either next day, or the day after that—
I don't know, it's just kind of a blur—
That I got to the spot where my brother lay curled
On his sled under layers of fur.
I scrambled as fast as my muscles could crawl,
Though the dread nearly drove me insane,

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There was nothing to do but to hug him and cry—
God had loosed him from all of his pain.
I think I passed out, 'cause the sun had gone down
By the time I was able to move—
I was hollow and empty in body and mind,
But I knew I had something to prove.
My brother was dead and he couldn't care less—
Even so, they had blackened his name.
I was bound and determined to set the facts straight.
If I died in the try—all the same.
I gave him a burial such as I could
And I said a few words to the Lord,
And then back to the trail—there was no time for tears,
Though his loss cut my heart like a sword.

I had only three dogs that could still pull a trace—
Only one of my brother's could stand—
But I figured that that would be more than enough
If things worked out the way that I planned.
I hitched up the three in a trace close to me
And I hitched up my brother's as lead,
Then I fashioned a sack from the furs on the sled—
It had all of the room that I'd need.
There were two main concerns. One was making it back
To the town before death pulled the shade.
The second was finding the man who killed Doc,
And I prayed that both points could be made.
I fastened the sack to the trace and climbed in,
Like a moth in a furry cocoon,
I yelled, and the dogs, without guidance from me,
Set a course for the sun at high noon.
I knew that they'd head for the place they'd been fed
And the lead dog knew just where to go—
He set them a pace like an Eskimo race
For the home that he'd known down below.
Without sled or supplies, my own weight on the trace
Was a feather they handled with ease.
In exhaustion my body cried out to go limp,
But I knew if I did I could freeze.
I kept flailing my arms and my legs in the sack
To send blood to my fingers and toes.

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In my dark little cave, there was no sense of time,
Just how long it was God only knows—
I can only remember a fog rolling in,
A sweet mist that enveloped my mind,
And at some point in time I passed over the line
To a rest of a different kind.
It was bright and sublime, and it called me to climb
To a height that I couldn't believe.
I was ready to go, but some tug from below
Brought me back to the body I'd leave.
I heard rumbles and murmurs, then voices I knew,
And the mists that I loved seemed to part—
I was back in a shed on a kind of a bed
And I heard the faint beat of my heart.
They said I'd been out for a week since the day
That the dogs hauled my body back in—
I had bad signs of frost, but they got me in time
And they saved every inch of my skin.
Like I figured, the lead dog had found his way home
To the very last home that he'd known—
He came back to the trapper who traded him off
To my brother to use as his own.
The Mountie had spotted us, just as we'd planned,
And he followed us right to the door
Of that trapper who later confessed to the crime.
I figure that settled the score.

That was twenty years back—Lord, it seems like a week.
When I healed, I went back to the wild,
Like an animal caged in the prime of its life,
To run free turned me back to a child.
Together we've coursed God's majestic back yard
And we've not had one unfulfilled day.
We've been unified spirits—my brother and me—
He's been with me each step of the way.

"Q"

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Just because he'd killed his wife, Andrew hadn't lost his sense of humor . . .

ROSIE'S LAST STAND

by DAVID PIERCE

The warning on the bottle had more or less said that one drop could halt a charging rhino, so Andrew Macatil, with a shaky hand, added *two* drops to his wife's herbal tea. (The person who had written the warning didn't know Rosie.) And when Andrew offered his wife her drink, his hands were trembling so much that the tea was white-capping like a stormy sea.

"What are you so nervous about?" Rosie, Andrew's wife of eight years, barked. She clutched the glass and calmed the waves. "You'd think you'd just murdered someone."

Ironically enough, Andrew thought, those were the last words ever out of Rosie's mouth (*Umph!* didn't count), because first she sipped and then gulped the tainted drink and a moment later she dropped like a rhino from a tree limb. "Umph!"

Andrew had done it. He could hardly believe it. He had snuffed her just like the bottle had warned. He slapped his imaginary partner-in-crime a high-five. But his excitement quickly faded when he thought about getting rid of the body. He had to get her away from the house, make it look like an accident. Not only did she have at least ninety pounds on Andrew, but now it was all dead weight, so to speak.

Andrew had married Rosie for all the obvious conveniences: they worked in the same factory; so it would be easy for them to car pool; she cooked (somewhat) and he ate; he was a man and she was a woman. However, he had grown tired of the constant harping, the barking, the griping, the yapping, and the yipping. It was like being married to a zoo. And he didn't have the nerve to ask her for a divorce. He'd rather kill her than do that—and so that's exactly what he'd done.

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A knock fell at the door, causing Andrew to scurry around and around the body, as if three laps would make it disappear. Finally he realized that he was going to have to move her. Careful to use his legs, he lifted Rosie just enough to plop her into his big easy chair. Her arms dangled over the sides like wet noodles, so he carefully raised each heavy hand and placed them in her lap. Her dark-green eyes were glued to the dead TV set across the room, so for the sake of verisimilitude he turned it on.

As he walked away to answer the door, Andrew felt Rosie's eyes on him. They followed him like a full moon will follow you on a drive through the country, like the eyes of a priceless portrait hanging in a museum. Andrew shivered, straightened his shirt, and opened the door—where Clara Debussy stood filling the doorway. Andrew had never met Clara before, but she introduced herself at the same instant his eyes beheld her, so there was never any question as to who she was.

She carried a tote bag with the words *Beautiful Babes* on the side and presented Andrew with a stiff forearm, driving past his 145 pounds into the living room without an invitation. "This is Thursday," she said. "Rosie's expecting me. Where is she? Ah, Rosie, there you are." Clara sat on the stool before Rosie and plopped her bag on the coffee table between them. She began dumping bundles of brochures, tubes of lipstick, bottles of eyeliner, packets of face powder, and a thick order pad from her bag before she noticed something odd about Rosie and stopped. Andrew held his breath.

"Rosie, what's the matter?" Clara squinted and leaned forward. So did Andrew. "Why, you're not wearing any base this morning, are you? Oh, always remember, Rosie—a happy face wears a good base."

Andrew exhaled and said, "I'm sorry, Mrs. Debussy, but Rosie's not feeling too well today, so—"

"If Rosie doesn't want me here—" Clara cut Andrew a hard look over her shoulder (as did Rosie) "—then let *Rosie* tell me." She looked smugly at Rosie and continued to dump her goods.

Andrew said, "I'll be in the kitchen."

He ran to the sink and nearly drowned himself splashing cold water on his face. He stopped only long enough to talk to his reflection in a copper-bottomed pot that hung from a carousel above the sink. Stay calm, Andrew, old boy. Just be firm. Suggest she come back tomorrow. Smile. Be friendly. Don't take no stiff forearm from no short chubby cosmetic lady and— Andrew stopped himself—a

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move which may have saved the cosmetic lady's life. Now he had *two* bodies to get rid of, one alive and one dead.

Clara's face lit up when he walked back into the living room.

"Mr. Macatil. Just in time. Rosie placed her order and she needs the checkbook." And then, almost apologetically, she added, "She's a bit low on some basics, and since I'm running a big sale now is a good time to stock up. So if you could just make the check for a hundred and ninety-five dollars, I'll be on my way."

Andrew did an about-face to the kitchen sink, where he consulted the copper-bottomed pot again. Checkbook. Checkbook. Just find the checkbook and pay the lady. Get rid of her. Maybe she knows something. Maybe she's blackmailing me. Maybe I should take this pot in there and— Andrew stopped himself again.

He found Rosie's purse on the kitchen table, fished out the checkbook, and returned to the living room just in time.

"What's going on here?" he said.

Rosie was still in the chair. Only now she had a bib tied around her neck and Clara, standing before her like an artist before a blank canvas, was applying one of Beautiful Babes' top-of-the-line cosmetics to her pale face. "Every customer is entitled to a free facial with every hundred dollars' worth of orders," she explained.

"Out! Out of my house!" Andrew bellowed. He'd never yelled like that before, not while Rosie was still living. It felt so good he did it again. "Take your bag and go!" he screamed and pointed dramatically at the front door.

When Clara saw that Rosie wasn't going to object, she grabbed up her empty bag and stormed out, not bothering to take her samples or brochures. Rosie merely sat quietly and watched her leave.

Alone again, Andrew paced about the room—behind Rosie's chair as much as possible—and formulated a plan. He'd take her to the car and maybe go for a little drive in the country—maybe down by the landfill. (It felt good to know that just because he'd killed his wife, he hadn't lost his sense of humor.) He turned off the TV, hoisted Rosie to her feet, and concentrated on all the laws of physics and leverage he'd learned in high school as he traversed the distance across the living-room floor. It was surprisingly easy.

When he opened the front door, however, two policemen were there to greet him, smiling and nodding simultaneously.

Andrew attempted to speak. "Wha-what? I—er—ah—"

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"Mr. Macatil?" the front officer, the small officer, the officer with the yellow notepad and pencil in his hand, said.

"Ah—yes?"

The officer looked at Rosie and checked his notepad. "Mrs. Macatil?"

"She is," Andrew answered for her.

"I'm Officer Spooner." The officer touched the pencil eraser to his chest. "And this is Officer Lebo." He hitched the pencil back over his shoulder, indicating the big officer behind him. Andrew figured this second officer had at least a good fifty pounds of his own over Rosie.

"We got a call from a Mrs. Clara Debussy a few minutes ago," said Officer Spooner. "She said you placed a big order and then refused to pay. Is that right?"

"Ah, yes. I mean, *no!* I mean, I placed a big order, but I want to order more—I want to make it a really big order. I may have said something to make her think I was finished, but I wasn't." Andrew's brain was clicking. "If you know where I can reach her, I'll gladly take care of it." Andrew was getting obsequious and Rosie was getting heavy.

"Might I say, Mrs. Macatil—" Officer Lebo spoke up from behind Officer Spooner "—you do look lovely."

Officer Spooner smiled at Andrew and said, "These mixups happen all the time. We'll talk with Mrs. Debussy and see if we can iron things out. Just try to be a bit clearer about your placing orders from now on, Mr. Macatil, okay?"

Andrew nodded.

"Have a good day, Mr. Macatil," Officer Spooner said. "And sorry to trouble you. Good day to you, Mrs. Macatil."

As the officers were walking away, Andrew could no longer uphold the laws of leverage. He felt his lumbar vertebrae crack and he and Rosie swayed back and forth, like lovers slow-dancing, until his knees gave in and Rosie overwhelmed him. They crashed onto the coffee table, sending powder compacts, wands of mascara and eyeliner, tubes of lipstick, and Beautiful Babes brochures up into the air and onto the floor. Andrew's neck cracked at a point just below the medulla oblongata.

"Hey! Mrs. Macatil, Mr. Macatil, break it up!" Officer Spooner cried, racing back through the front door with his partner.

He and Lebo lifted Rosie from off of Andrew without a fight. Officer

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Lebo eased her onto Andrew's easy chair while Officer Spooner knelt by Andrew and placed a trained hand against his carotid artery.

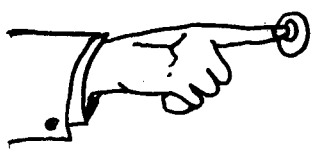
"I'll call an ambulance," Lebo said, reaching for the phone.

"And a coroner," Spooner announced. "He's dead."

They turned their attention to Rosie. "It's always the pretty ones you have to watch out for," Officer Lebo said, slightly disappointed. He unhitched his handcuffs, cuffed one of Rosie's thick wrists, and wrestled around her midriff for her other hand. "You can cooperate, Mrs. Macatil, or we can do this the hard way," he threatened. From behind, he pushed her head forward, seized her other hand, and cuffed her wrists together. "Okay, now—on your feet."

Nothing.

Officer Spooner retrieved his notepad and, with one hand, flipped it to a worn page and said, "Rosie Macatil, as an officer of the law, it is my duty to inform you that you have the right to remain silent—"



DETECTIVERSE

THE RIGHT TOUCH

by GENE KEWAN

There once was a thief named Susskind,
Who stalked his prey from behind—
His hands were so quick
When they slipped in to pick
That his victims paid him no mind.

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a distinguished Rumpole story by

JOHN MORTIMER

"I'm not interested in the sex side, of course," Erskine-Brown said. "But I just don't feel that Allways is the right person to carry on the best traditions of these Chambers."

"I agree," Hoskins agreed.

"So Fiona Allways can swell the ranks of the unemployed?" Rumpole asked with some asperity.

"Oh, come on, Rumpole. She's got a rich daddy. She's not going to starve."

"Only miss the one thing she's ever wanted to do," Rumpole grumbled.

One of Horace Rumpole's most delightful, from the collection Rumpole and the Golden Thread *(included in Penguin's* The Second Rumpole Omnibus*). In February, Viking made available for the first time in the U.S. the author's* Like Men Betrayed, *a powerful novel that won raves when it was first published in England 35 years ago . . .*

RUMPOLE AND THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES

by JOHN MORTIMER

It may be said by those who read these memoirs, particularly by those of the female persuasion, that Rumpole is in some ways unsympathetic to the aspirations of women. This may be because, in the privacy of my own thoughts and when writing late at night in the solitary confines of my kitchen, I refer to my wife, Hilda Rumpole, as "She Who Must Be Obeyed." It is true that I have given

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her this title, but Hilda's character, her air of easy command, which might, if she had been born in other circumstances, have brought empires under her sway, and her undisputed government of our daily life at Froxbury Court, entitles her to no less an acclamation. Those who feel that I am not firmly on the female side in the Battle of the Sexes may care to consider my long struggle to get Miss Fiona Allways accepted as a member of our Chambers at Equity Court, and those who might think that I only engaged myself in this struggle to annoy the egregious Bollard and irritate Claude Erskine-Brown are guilty of a quite unworthy cynicism.

The dispute over the entry of Miss Allways into our close-knit group of learned friends arose during the time that our Chambers had a brief in the Pond Hill bank job. We were charged with the defense of Tony Timson.

I have written repeatedly elsewhere of the Timsons, the large family of South London villains who, many years ago, appointed me their Attorney-General and whose unending efforts have brought a considerable amount of work to Equity Court. Tony Timson belonged to the younger generation of the clan. He occupied a pleasant, semi-detached house on a South London estate with his wife, April, and their child, Vincent. His house was lavishly furnished with a large variety of video-recording machines, television sets, hi-fi equipment, spin-driers, eye-line grills, ultraviolet-ray cookers, deep freezes, and suchlike aids to gracious living. Many of these articles were said to be the fruit of Tony Timson's tireless night work.

When Inspector Broome called at the Timson house shortly after the Pond Hill bank job, he found the young master alone and playing "Home Sweet Home" on a newly acquired electric organ. He also found five thousand pounds in crisp, new, neatly packaged twenty-pound notes in the gleaming Super Snow White Extra Deluxe-model washing machine. Tony Timson was ripped from the bosom of his wife April and young Vincent, and placed within the confines of Brixton Prison, and I wondered if I should ultimately get the brief.

The appointment of Rumpole for the defense should, of course, have been a foregone conclusion. But the Timson Solicitor-General was Mr. Bernard, and between that gentleman and Rumpole there was a bit of a cold wind blowing, owing to a tiff which had taken place one day at the Uxbridge Magistrates Court. I had arrived at this particular Palais de Justice a little late one day, owing to a tailback on the Piccadilly Line, only to discover that the gutless

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Bernard had allowed our client of the day to plead guilty to a charge of handling. He had thrown in the towel!

I hadn't actually been rude to Mr. Bernard. I had merely improved his education by quoting Shakespeare's *Richard II*. " 'O, villain, viper, damned without redemption!' " I said to my instructing solicitor. " 'Would you make peace? Terrible hell make war upon your spotted soul for this.' " Mr. Bernard, it seemed, hadn't appreciated the quality of the lines and there was, as I say, an east wind blowing between us. So I wasn't greatly surprised when Henry gave me an account of what happened when Bernard came into our clerk's room and gave Henry the brief in R. *v.* Timson. Henry said that he supposed that would be for Mr. Rumpole.

"You suppose wrong, young man," Mr. Bernard said firmly.

"Do I?" Henry raised his eyebrows.

"The brief is clearly marked for the attention of Mrs. Phillida Erskine-Brown," Bernard pointed out, and Henry saw that it was so. "I can put up with a good deal, Henry, from members of the so-called senior branch of our great profession," Mr. Bernard told him, "but I will not be called a villainous viper in the clear hearing of the clerk to the Uxbridge Magistrates Court."

At which point Mrs. Phillida Erskine-Brown, now an extremely successful lady barrister, entered the clerk's room and Henry handed her the papers.

"A wonderfully prepared brief, I don't doubt, like all Mr. Bernard's work." Phillida smiled with great charm at the glowing solicitor, and then asked tactfully, "How's your daughter, Mr. Bernard? Polytechnic going well still, is it?" Mrs. Erskine-Brown, since the days when she was plain Miss Phillida Trant, hadn't got where she was by legal ability alone; she was expert at public relations.

"Three A's," Mr. Bernard was delighted to say. "Thank you for asking."

"And *still* keeping up her figure skating, I bet. Chip off the old block, wouldn't you say so, Henry? See you in Brixton, Mr. Bernard."

She flashed another smile and went on her way, whereupon Bernard told Henry that he always thought that Mrs. Erskine-Brown had a real feeling for the law.

I had decided to improve the facilities in our mansion flat at Froxbury Court by erecting a shelf on our living-room wall to accommodate such necessities as *The Oxford Book of English Verse* (the Quiller-Couch edition), Professor Andrew Ackerman on *The*

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Importance of Bloodstains in the Detection of Crime, Archbold's *Criminal Pleading and Practice,* a little out of date, and a spare bottle or two of Chateau Thames Embankment of a fairly recent year. I celebrated my entry into the construction industry by buying what I think is known as a "kit" of Easy-Do Convenience Shelving and a few basic tools, and in no time at all, such was my natural feeling for woodwork, I had the shelf up and triumphantly bearing its load.

When I showed the results of my labors to Hilda, she didn't immediately congratulate me, but asked, unnecessarily I thought, if I had "plugged" the wall in accordance with the instructions that came in the Easy-Do box.

"I never read the instructions to counsel before doing a murder, Hilda," I told her firmly. "Rely on the facts, and the instinct of the advocate. It's never let me down yet in Court."

"Well, I do notice you haven't been in Court very much lately." Hilda took an unfair advantage.

"A temporary lull in business. Nothing serious," I assured her.

"It's because you're rude to solicitors." Hilda, of course, knew best. I didn't want to argue the matter further, so I told her that my new shelf was firm as a rock and added an air of distinction to our living room.

"Are you sure it's straight?" Hilda asked. "I think it's definitely at an angle."

"Oh, really, Hilda! It's because *you're* at an angle," I said, I'm afraid a little impatiently. "One small gin and tonic at lunchtime and you do your well known imitation of the Leaning Tower of Pisa."

"Well, if that's how you talk to solicitors—" Hilda was starting to tidy away my carpenter's tools and sweep up the sawdust "—no wonder I've got you at home all day." As I have remarked earlier, there is a good deal to be said in favor of She Who Must Be Obeyed, but she's hardly a fair opponent in an argument.

I left our improved home and went down to Chambers and, there being not much else to engage my attention before a five o'clock Chambers meeting, I took a little time off to instruct Miss Fiona Allways, who had proudly acquired a case entirely of her own, in the art of making a final speech for the defense. Picture us then, alone in my room, the teacher Rumpole standing as though to address the Court and the pupil Allways sitting obediently to learn.

"Soon this case will be over, members of the jury." I gave her my usual peroration. "In a little while you will go back to your jobs and

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your families, and you will forget all about it. At most it is only a small part of your lives. But for my client it is the *whole* of his life! And it is that life I leave with confidence in your hands, certain that there can be only one verdict in this case—'Not Guilty!' —Sink down exhausted, then, Fiona," I told her, "mopping the brow." I sat and plied a large red spotted handkerchief. "Good end to a final speech, don't you think?"

"Will it work just as well for me?" she asked doubtfully. "I mean, my man's only accused of nicking six frozen chicken pieces from Safeways."

"Goes just as well on any occasion!" I assured her.

And then Claude Erskine-Brown put his head round the door and told me that Ballard was upstairs and just about to start the Chambers meeting. Erskine-Brown then retired and Fiona looked at me in a despondent sort of manner.

"Is this when they decide—" she sounded desperately anxious "—if they're going to let me stay on here?"

"Don't worry. I shall tell them—" I promised her.

"What?"

"Well, let me think. Something like, 'The female of the species is more deadly than the male.' Look on the bright side, Miss Allways. Perk up, Fiona. I've cracked far tougher Courts than that lot up there!"

I went to the door without any real idea of how to handle the case of Allways and then, as so often happens, thank God, inspiration struck. I turned back toward her.

"Oh, by the way," I said. "Just one question. You know old Claude, who just popped his head in here?"

"Mr. Erskine-Brown?"

"He doesn't tickle your fancy, does he, by any chance? You don't find him devastatingly attractive?"

"Of course not!" Fiona managed her first smile of the day. "He's hardly Paul Newman, is he?"

"No, I suppose he isn't." I must confess the news came to me as something of a relief. "Well, that's all right then. I'll see what I can do."

Ballard had made a few changes, none of them very much for the better, in Featherstone's old room. Guthrie's comfortable chairs had gone, and his silver cigarette-box, his picture of Marigold and the children, his comforting sherry decanter and bone-china tea service, and his perfectly harmless watercolors. Ballard had few luxuries

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except a number of etchings of English cathedrals in plain, light oak frames, the corners of which protruded in a Gothic and ecclesiastical manner, and an old tin of ginger biscuits which stood on his desk, and which he never offered about.

"Sorry. Am I late for Evensong?" I asked cheerfully as I sat beside Uncle Tom. Ballard, without a glance in my direction, continued with the business in hand.

"We have to consider an application by Fiona Allways for a permanent seat in Chambers," he said. "Mrs. Erskine-Brown, you were her pupil master."

"Mistress," I corrected him, but nobody noticed.

"It's an extremely tough life at the Bar for a woman," Phillida spoke from the depths of her experience. "I'm by no means sure that Allways has got what it takes. Just as a for instance, she burst into tears when left alone at Thames Magistrates Court."

"I know exactly how she felt," I said. "That was never my favorite tribunal."

"Of course. Rumpole's done a case with her." Ballard looked at me in a vaguely accusing manner.

"She took a note for me once. Something about her I liked," I had to admit. And when Hoskins asked me what it was, I said that she felt strongly about winning cases.

"Who is this fellow Allways?" Uncle Tom asked with an expression of mild bewilderment.

"This fellow's a girl, Uncle Tom," I told him.

"Oh, good heavens. Are we getting another one of them?" our oldest inhabitant grumbled, and Mrs. Erskine-Brown brought the discussion up to date by saying, "I really don't think that the mere fact that this girl is a girl should guarantee her a place at 3 Equity Court."

"Philly's perfectly right." Claude came in as a dutiful husband should. "We shouldn't take in a token woman, like a token black."

"Are we taking in a black woman, then?" Uncle Tom merely asked for clarity.

"This is obviously a problem that has to be taken seriously." Ballard spoke disapprovingly from the chair.

"Well, I think we should go for a well established man. Someone who's got to know a few solicitors, who can bring work to Chambers," Mrs. Erskine-Brown suggested politically.

"Steady on, Portia old fellow," I cautioned her. "Whatever happened to the quality of mercy?"

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"I honestly don't see what mercy has to do with it."

"Dear God," I was moved to say. "It seems but yesterday that Miss Phillida Trant, white in the wig and a newcomer to the ladies' robing room, was accusing Henry of hiding the key to the lavatory as a sexist gesture! Can it be that now you've stormed the citadel you want to slam the door behind you?"

"Really, Rumpole!" Ballard called me to order. "You're not addressing a jury now. I don't think anyone could possibly accuse this Chambers of having the slightest prejudice against female barristers."

"Of course not. Provided they settle somewhere else, no doubt we find them quite delightful," I agreed.

"I believe I've told you all that I've applied for a silk gown." Erskine-Brown was never tired of telling us this.

"And I'm sure you'll look extremely pretty in it," I assured him.

"And from what I hear, quite informally of course—"

"In the bag, is it, Erskine-Brown?"

"That's not for me to say, but Philly is, of course, right behind me in this."

"Absolutely," his wife assured him. The Erskine-Browns were in a conjugal mood that day. And he rambled on, saying, "So with two—Q.C.s at the top, it would be a great pity if these Chambers became weak in the tail."

"What would be a pity?" Uncle Tom asked me.

"If our tail got weak, Uncle Tom."

"Of course it would." It was a puzzling meeting for the old boy. Erskine-Brown didn't further enlighten him by saying, "I'm not interested in the sex side, of course." I noticed then that his wife was looking into the middle distance in a detached sort of way. "But I just don't feel that Allways is the right person to carry on the best traditions of these Chambers."

"I agree," Hoskins agreed.

"So Fiona Allways can swell the ranks of the unemployed?" I asked with some asperity.

"Oh, come on, Rumpole. She's got a rich daddy. She's not going to starve."

"Only miss the one thing she's ever wanted to do," I grumbled, but Ballard was collecting the final views of the meeting. He asked Uncle Tom for his considered opinion.

"I remember a Fiona. Used to work in the List Office." Uncle Tom

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wasn't particularly helpful. "She wasn't black, of course. No, I'm against it."

"Well, I think I've got the sense of the meeting. I shall tell Miss Allways that she'll have to look elsewhere."

It was time for quick thinking, and I thought extremely quickly. The best way to confuse lawyers is to tell them about a law which they think they've forgotten.

"Just a moment." I hauled a diary out of my waistcoat pocket.

"What is it, Rumpole?" Ballard sounded impatient.

"This isn't the third Thursday of the Hilary Term!" I said severely.

"Of course it isn't." Erskine-Brown had not got my point, but I had, just in time. "Well!" I said positively. "We always decide questions of Chambers entry on the third Thursday of the Hilary Term. It was the rule of my sainted father-in-law's day. Guthrie Featherstone, Q.C., observed it religiously. Of course, if the new broom wants to make any *radical* changes—?" I looked at Ballard in a strict sort of way, and I must say he flinched.

"Well, no," he said, "I suppose not. Are you sure it's the rule?" He looked at Erskine-Brown, who couldn't say he remembered it.

"You were in rompers, Erskine-Brown, when this thing was first decided," I told him impatiently. "Our old clerk, Albert, said it was impossible otherwise, from a bookkeeping point of view. I do think we should keep to the rules, don't you, Bollard? I mean, we can't have anarchy at Equity Court!"

"That's in four weeks' time." Ballard was consulting his diary now.

"Exactly!"

Ballard put away his diary and came to a decision. "We'll deal with it then. It shouldn't take long, as we've reached a conclusion."

"Oh, no. A mere formality," I agreed.

"What are you playing at, Rumpole?" Mrs. Erskine-Brown was looking at me with some suspicion.

"Nothing much, Portia," I assured her. "Merely keeping up the best traditions of these Chambers."

The Pond Hill branch of the United Metropolitan Bank was held up by a number of men in stocking masks, who carried holdalls from which emerged a sawn-off shotgun or two and a sledgehammer for shattering the glass in front of the cashier. When the robbery was complete, the four masked men ran to the getaway car, a stolen Ford Cortina, which was waiting for them outside the bank, and it was

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this vehicle, the prosecution alleged, that Tony Timson had been driving. On the way to the car one of the men stumbled and fell. He was seized upon by an officer on traffic duty, and later found to be a Mr. Gerry Molloy—a remarkable fact when you consider the deep hostility which has always existed between the Timson family and the clan Molloy. Indeed, these two tribes have hated each other for as long as I can remember and I have already chronicled an instance of their feud.*

It seems that all the other men engaged on the Pond Hill enterprise were Molloys. They got away, so it was hardly to be wondered at that Mr. Gerald Molloy decided to become a grass and involve a Timson when he told his story to the police.

In the course of time, Mrs. Erskine-Brown and her instructing solicitor went to Brixton to see their client, but, as I later heard from him and from Mr. Bernard, Tony Timson seemed to have only one thing on his mind as he walked into the interview room and said, "Where's Mr. Rumpole?"

Phillida Erskine-Brown, in her jolliest "we're all lads together" voice, merely said, "Care for a fag, Tony?" Tony didn't mind if he did, and when Phillida had lit it for him, Bernard broke the bad news.

"This is Mrs. Erskine-Brown, Tony," he said. "She's going to be your brief."

"I see they've charged you with taking part in the robbery, not merely the receiving. Of course, they've done that on Gerry Molloy's evidence." Phillida started off in a businesslike way, but Tony Timson was looking at his solicitor in a kind of panic and paying no attention to her at all.

"Mr. Rumpole's always the Timsons' brief," he said. "You know that, Mr. Bernard. Mr. Rumpole defended my dad and my Uncle Cyril and saw me through my Juvenile Court and my Borstal training—"

"Mr. Rumpole can't have done all that well for you if you got Borstal training," Bernard said reasonably.

"Well—" Tony looked at Phillida for support. "Win a few, lose a few, you know that, missus?"

"Any reason why Gerry Molloy should grass on you, Tony?" Phillida tried to return to the matter in hand.

*See "Rumpole and the Younger Generation" in *Rumpole of the Bailey*, Penguin Books, 1978.

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"Look, it's good of you to come here, but—"

At which Phillida, no doubt in an attempt to reassure the client, lapsed into robbers' argot. "You ever had a meet with him where any sort of bank job was ever mentioned?" she asked. "Molloy says in the deps that he was the sledge, two others had sawn-offs in their holdalls, and you were the driver. He says you're pretty good on wheels, Tony."

"This is highly embarrassing, this is." Tony looked suitably pained at Phillida's personal knowledge of crime.

"What is, Tony?" She did her best to sound deeply sympathetic.

"You being a woman and all. It don't feel right, not with a woman."

"Don't think of me as a woman, Tony," she tried to reassure him. "Think of me entirely as a brief."

"It's no good." Tony shook his head. "I keep thinking of my wife, April."

"Well, of course she's worried about you. That's only natural, seeing you got nicked, Tony."

"I don't mean that. I mean I wouldn't want a woman like my April to take on my job, would I? Briefs, and us what gets ourselves into a bit of trouble down the Bailey and that. It's all man's work, innit?"

Well, that may come as a shrewd shock to all readers of those women's pages which I have occasionally glanced at in Fiona Allway's *Guardian,* but I'm told that it is exactly what Tony Timson said. As a consequence, it was a rueful Phillida Erskine-Brown who walked away from the interview room, across the yard where the screws exercised the alsatians and the trusties weeded the flower beds, toward the gate.

"The Timsons are such *old-fashioned* villains." Mr. Bernard apologized for them. "They're always about half a century behind the times."

"It's not your fault, Mr. Bernard," said Phillida miserably.

"You wait till my wife gets to hear about this! They're pretty hot on women's rights in the Hammersmith S.D.P." Bernard was clearly deeply affronted.

"It's the client's right to choose." Phillida was taking it on the chin.

"It's decent of you to be like that about it, Mrs. Erskine-Brown. It's absolutely no reflection on you, of course. But—" Bernard looked deeply embarrassed "—I'm afraid I'll have to take in a chap to lead you."

They had arrived at the gatehouse and were about to be sprung

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when Phillida Erskine-Brown looked at Mr. Bernard and said she wondered who the chap would be exactly.

"It goes against the grain," said Bernard, "but we've really got no choice, have we?"

A good deal later that evening I was on my way home when I happened to pass Pommeroy's Wine Bar and, in the hope that they might be offloading cooking claret at a reasonable rate, I went in and saw, alone and palely loitering at the bar with an oldish sandwich and a glass of hock, none other than Claude Erskine-Brown. I saw the chance of playing another card in the long game of "Getting Fiona into Chambers," and I engaged the woebegone figure in conversation, the burden of which was that Phillida was so enormously busy at the Bar that the sandwich might well have to do for the Erskine-Brown supper.

"Of course," I said sympathetically, "your wife must be pretty hard pressed now she's taken the Timsons off me."

"She doesn't get home in the evenings until Tristan's gone to bed," Erskine-Brown told me, and I looked at him and said, "Just as well."

"Do you think so?" The man sounded slightly offended.

"Just as well young Fiona Allways isn't coming into chambers," I explained.

"You agree that we shouldn't take her?"

"In all the circumstances, well, perhaps I'd better not say anything."

"*What* do you mean, Rumpole?" Erskine-Brown was puzzled.

"It might have raised all sorts of problems. I mean, it might have got too much for you to handle."

"*What* might have got too much for me to handle?"

"It would create all sorts of difficulties, in the spring, and all that sort of thing. We don't want the delicate perfume of young Fiona floating around Chambers, do we?" I said, as casually as possible.

"Well, I don't suppose I'd've seen much of her."

"Oh, but you would, you know."

"Not as a silk."

"You'd've been thrown together. Chambers meetings. Brushing past each other in the clerk's room. Before you knew where you were, you'd be popping out for tea and a couple of chocky biscuits in the ABC." I looked as gravely concerned as I knew how. "Terribly dangerous!"

"Why on earth?" He still hadn't quite caught my drift.

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"Well, you know exactly what these young lady barristers are—impressionable, passionate even, and enormously impressed with the older legal hack, especially one teetering on the verge of knee breeches and a silk gown."

"You don't mean—?" I could see that now he had perked up considerably.

"And she seems to find you extremely personable, Claude!" I laid it on thick. "You put her in distinct mind, so she has told me, of a film actor—'Newman,' could that be the name?" I asked innocently, and drained my glass. At which moment, Claude Erskine-Brown took off his spectacles and admired himself in one of the mirrors, decorated with fronds of frosty vegetation, that cover Pommeroy's walls. "Ridiculous!" he said, but I could see that the old fish was well and truly hooked.

"Of course it's ridiculous," I agreed. "But on second thoughts, far better she doesn't get into Chambers. Wouldn't you agree?" I left him then, but as I went out of Pommeroy's, Erskine-Brown was still looking at himself shortsightedly in the mirror.

The next day Henry gave me the glad news that I was to be leading the extraordinarily busy Mrs. Phillida Erskine-Brown in the Timson defense. It seemed that Mr. Bernard had seen sense on the subject of our little disagreement at Uxbridge, but Henry told me, extremely severely, that he couldn't go on clerking for me if I called my instructing solicitor a "viper" again. I asked him if he'd pass "snake," assured him I wasn't serious, and then went up to seek out our new Head of Chambers in his lair.

I was going to play the next card in the Fiona Allways game. I knocked at the door, heard a cry of "Who is it?" and found Ballard with a cup of tea and a ginger biscuit working on some massive prosecution involving a large number of villains who were all represented by different-colored pencils.

"Oh, it's you." Our leader didn't sound particularly welcoming. All the same, I came in, pushed Ballard's papers aside, and sat on the edge of his desk.

"Just thought I ought to give you a friendly warning," I started confidentially.

"Isn't it you that needs warning? Henry tells me that you've taken to being offensive to Mr. Bernard."

I lit up a small cigar and blew out smoke. Ballard coughed pointedly. "It doesn't do Chambers any good, you know, insulting a so-

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licitor," he told me. By way of answer I closed my eyes and tried a vivid description.

"Fascinating character!" I began. "Marvelous hair, burnished like autumn leaves. Tender white neck, sticking out of the starched white collar—"

"Mr. Bernard?" Ballard was puzzled.

"Of course not!" I put him right. "I was speaking of Miss Phillida Trant, now Mrs. Erskine-Brown." I brought out the packet of small cigars and offered it. "You don't smoke, I suppose?"

"You know I don't."

"What *do* you do, I wonder?" There was a short diversion as Ballard blew my ash off his depositions and then I said thoughtfully, "Gorgeous creature in many ways, our Portia."

"With a most enviable practice, I understand," Ballard agreed. "Perhaps she's polite to solicitors."

"Determined to rise to the absolute top."

"I have the highest respect for Phillida, of course, but—"

"Devious." I supplied the word. "A brilliant mind, of course, but devious!"

"Rumpole, what are you trying to tell me?" Ballard seemed anxious to bring our dialogue to a swift conclusion.

"The way she got you to show your sexual prejudices at that Chambers meeting!" I said with admiration.

"My *what?*"

"Your blind and Victorian opposition to women in the legal profession. I believe she's writing a report on that to the Bar Council. Plus ten articles for the *Observer,* in depth."

"But, Rumpole, she spoke *against* Allways." Ballard was already arguing weakly.

"What a tactician!" For the sake of emphasis, I gave Ballard a brisk slap on the shoulder.

"She seemed totally opposed to the girl."

I slipped off his desk and took a turn round the room. "Just to lead you on, don't you see. To get *you* to show your hand. You walked right into it, Bollard. I can see the headlines now! 'Christian barrister presides over sexist redoubt!' 'Bollard, Q.C., puts the clock back fifty years!' "

"Ballard." He corrected me without too much conviction and said, "I didn't take that attitude, surely."

"You will have done," I assured him, "by the time our Phillida's finished with you. Don't cross her, Bollard, I warn you. She has the

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ear of the Lord Chancellor. I don't know if you were ever hoping for some sort of minor judgeship—" I went to the door and then turned back to Ballard. "Of course, you have one thing in your favor."

"What's that?" He seemed prepared to clutch at a straw. It was then that I played the ace. "Our Portia seems to have taken something of a shine to you," I told him. " 'Craggily handsome' I think was the way she put it. I suppose there's just a chance you might get round her. Try using your irresistible charm."

I left him then. The poor old darling was looking like a person who has to choose between a public execution and a heady draught of hemlock.

Whatever may be said about the equality of the sexes, there is still something about the nature of women which parts the average man almost entirely from his marbles. Faced with most problems, both Erskine-Brown and Ballard might have proved reasonably resolute. When the question concerned a moderately personable young woman, they became as clay in the potter's hands. These thoughts passed through my mind as I lay in bed that night staring at the ceiling, while Hilda sat at the dressing table in night attire, brushing her hair before coming to bed.

"What are you thinking, Rumpole?" she asked. "I know you, Rumpole. You're lying there *thinking* about something!"

"I was thinking," I confessed, "about man's attitude to the female of the species."

"Oh, were you indeed?" Hilda sounded deeply suspicious.

"On the one hand, the presence of a woman strikes him with terror—"

"Really, Rumpole, don't be absurd," Hilda said severely.

"And fierce resentment."

"Is *that* what you were thinking?"

"And yet he finds her not only indispensable, but quite irresistible. Faced with a whiff of perfume, for instance, he is reduced to a state bordering on imbecility."

"Rumpole. Are you really?" Hilda's voice had softened considerably. The room became redolent with the smell of lavender water. Hilda was spraying on perfume.

" 'She is a woman, therefore may be woo'd/She is a woman, therefore may be won,' " I repeated sleepily.

I saw Hilda emerge from her dressing gown and make toward the

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bed. She said, "Oh, Rumpole," quite tenderly. But then sleep claimed me, and I heard no more.

One afternoon I turned up at the gates of Brixton Prison with my learned junior, Mrs. Phillida Erskine-Brown, and there was Mr. Bernard waiting for us and replying to my hearty greeting in a somewhat guarded manner.

"Hail to thee, blythe Bernard!" I said, and he replied, "We're taking you in on the express wishes of the client, Mr. Rumpole. Just for this case."

I then became aware of a pleasant-looking young woman with blonde hair and a small, rather plump child who was sitting slumped in a pushchair, regarding me with a wary eye.

"Mr. Rumpole." The lady introduced herself. "I'm April Timson. Tony's glad that you're going to be his brief."

My companion looked less than flattered, but I greeted our client's family warmly.

"Mrs. Timson, good of you to say so. And who's this young hopeful?"

"That's our young Vince. Been in to see his dad," said the child's proud mother.

"Delighted to meet you, Vincent," I said, and managed to leave a thought with April which might pay off in the course of time. "Let me know," I said, "the moment he gets into trouble."

"Straight up, it's a sodding plant," said Tony Timson, and then turned apologetically to my junior. "Pardon my French."

"Don't be so silly, Tony." Phillida didn't like not being taken for one of the boys. We were sitting in a small glass-walled room in the interview block at Brixton, and I felt I had to question Tony further as to his suggested defense.

"What sort of a plant are you suggesting?" I asked. "A floribunda of the Serious Crimes Squad or an exotic bloom cultivated by the Molloys?"

"That D.I. Broome. He's got no love for the Timsons," Tony grumbled.

"Neither have the Molloys."

"That's true, Mr. Rumpole. That's very true."

"A plant by the supergrass's family? I suppose it's possible." I considered the suggestion.

"I'd say it's typical."

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"So some person unknown brought in the cash and popped it into your Super Snow White Extra Deluxe Easy-Wash?" I framed the charge.

"The jury may now wonder how Tony can afford all these luxuries out of window-cleaning," Phillida suggested.

"It's not a luxury. My April says it's just something you got to have," said Tony, the proud householder.

"You know how he affords these things, Portia?" I explained our case to one not expert in the Timson branch of the law. "Tony's a minor villain. Small stuff. Let's have a look at his form." I plucked a sheet of paper from my brief. "Warehouse-breaking, shop-breaking, criminal damage to a set of traffic lights—"

"I misjudged a turning, Mr. Rumpole," Tony admitted. It was the item of which he seemed slightly ashamed. But there was more to come.

"Careless driving, dangerous driving, failure to report an accident," I read out. "Look here, old sweetheart, if I get you out of this, do promise not to give me a lift home."

That same evening, Claude Erskine-Brown put his head round the door of my room, where Miss Fiona Allways was looking up a bit of law, and invited her to join him in a bottle of Pommeroy's bubbly. Naturally anxious to be on friendly terms with those who held her legal future in their hands, she accepted the invitation, and I am indebted to her for an account of what then took place.

Once ensconced at a corner table in the shadowy regions of the wine bar, Erskine-Brown took off his spectacles and sighed as though worn out by the cares of office.

"It can be lonely at the top, Fiona," he said. "I mean, you may wonder what it feels like to be on the verge of becoming a Q.C." Perhaps he was waiting for her to say something, but as she didn't he repeated with a sigh, "I'll tell you. Lonely."

"But you've got Mrs. Erskine-Brown." Fiona was puzzled.

Claude gave her a sad little smile. "Mrs. Erskine-Brown! I seem to see so little of Phillida nowadays. Pressures of work, of course. No," he went on seriously, "there comes a time in this job when a person feels terribly alone."

"I suppose so." Fiona felt the topic was becoming exhausted.

"I envy you those happy, carefree days when you hop from Magistrates Court to Magistrates Court, picking up little crumbs of indecent exposure."

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"Frozen chicken," Fiona corrected him.

"What?" Erskine-Brown looked puzzled.

"I was doing a case about frozen chicken pieces. It seemed quite a responsibility to me."

As the subject had moved from himself, Claude's attention wandered. He looked across to the bar and said, "Is that old Rumpole over there?"

"Why?" Fiona asked, in all innocence. "Can't you see without your glasses?"

In fact, and this Erskine-Brown didn't notice, perhaps because she was hidden in the melee at the bar, I had come into the joint with Phillida in order that we might refresh ourselves after a hard conference at Brixton. I said I hoped she had no hard feelings about me being taken in to lead her in the Timson affair. She confessed to just a few hard feelings, but was then sporting enough to buy us a perfectly reasonable bottle.

"Criminals and barristers, Portia," I told her as Jack Pommeroy was uncorking the claret. "Both extremely conservative professions—"

But before she had time to absorb this thought, Phillida was off like a hound on the scent toward a corner of the room. Again I have to rely on Miss Allways' account for what was going on at the distant table.

"And if ever you have the slightest problem," Erskine-Brown was saying gently, "of a legal nature, or anything else come to that, don't hesitate, Fiona. A silk's door is always open to a member of Chambers, however junior."

"A member of Chambers?" Fiona repeated hopefully.

"I'm sure. I mean, some old squares are tremendously prejudiced against women, of course. But speaking for myself—" he put a hand on one of Fiona's which she had left lying about on the table "—I have absolutely no objection to a pretty face around Number 3 Equity Court."

"Haven't you, Claude?" Mrs. Erskine-Brown had fetched up beside the table and spoke with considerable asperity.

"Oh, Philly." Erskine-Brown hastily withdrew his hand. "Are you going to join us for a drink? You know Fiona, of course—"

"Yes. I know Allways." Phillida looked suspiciously at the gold-topped bottle. "What is it? Somebody's birthday? No, I'm not joining you two. I'm going to go straight back to Chambers and write a letter."

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At which Phillida Erskine-Brown banged out of Pommeroy's, leaving her husband with a somewhat foolish expression on his face, and me with an entire bottle of claret.

Phillida, always as good as her word, did go back to her room in Chambers and started to write a lengthy and important letter to an official quarter. It was whilst she was doing this that there came a tap at her door, which she ignored, and then the devout Ballard entered uninvited.

This time I have to rely on our Portia for a full account of what transpired, and when she told me, over a rather hilarious celebratory bottle about a month later, her recollection may have grown somewhat dim, but she swears that it was a Ballard transformed who came gliding up to her desk. He was wearing a somewhat garish spotted tie (in pink and blue, as she remembered it), a matching silk handkerchief lolled from his top pocket, and surrounding the man was a fairly overpowering odor of some aftershave which the manufacturers advertise as Trouble-starter. He was also smiling.

"I saw your light on," Ballard murmured. Apparently Phillida didn't find this a statement of earth-shaking interest and went on writing.

"Mrs. Erskine-Brown," Ballard tried again. "You won't mind me calling you Phyllis?"

"If you want to, but it doesn't happen to be my name." Phillida didn't look up from her writing.

"Burning the midnight oil?"

"It's only half past six."

Although she had given him little encouragement, Ballard came and perched, no doubt as he thought jauntily, on the corner of her desk and made what seemed to Phillida to be an entirely unnecessary disclosure. "I've never married, of course," he said.

"Lucky you!" Phillida said with meaning as she went on with her work.

"I lead what I imagine you'd call a bit of a bachelor life in Dulwich. Decent-sized flat, though, all that sort of thing."

"Oh, good," Phillida said in as neutral a manner as possible.

"But I don't want you to run away with the idea that I don't like *women,* because I do like women—very much indeed. I am a perfectly normal sort of chap in that regard," Ballard assured her.

"Oh, jolly good." Phillida was still busy.

"In fact, I have to confess this to you. I find the sight of a woman

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wigged and wearing a winged collar surprisingly—well, let's be honest about this—alluring." There was a considerable pause and then he blurted out, "I saw you the other day, going up the stairs in the Law Courts, robed up!"

"Did you? I was on my way to do a divorce." Phillida was folding her letter with a grim determination.

"Well, I just didn't want you to be under any illusions." Ballard stood and gave Phillida what was no doubt meant to be a challenging look. "I'm thoroughly in favor of women, from every point of view."

"I'm sure the news will come as an enormous relief to the women of the world!" She licked the envelope and stuck it down. What she said seemed to have a strange effect on Ballard and he became extremely nervous.

"Oh, I don't want it published in the papers!" he said anxiously. "I thought I'd make it perfectly clear to you, in the course of private conversation."

"Well, you've made it clear, Ballard." Phillida looked him in the eye for the first time, and didn't particularly like what she saw.

"Please—'Sam,' " he corrected her skittishly.

"All right, 'Sam.' You've made it terribly clear."

"Look. Someday when you're not in Court—" he was smiling at her again "—why don't you let me take you out to a spot of lunch? They do a very decent set meal at the Ludgate Hotel."

Phillida looked at him with amazement and contempt. She then got up and walked past him to the door, taking her letter. "I've got to put this out to post," was all she had to say to that.

I had gone back to our clerk's room to pick up some forgotten papers and was alone there, Henry and Dianne having left for some unknown destination, when Phillida came to put her letter in the Post tray on Dianne's desk.

"What on earth happened, Portia?" I asked her. "You left me to finish the bottle."

"Has everyone in this Chambers gone completely out of their heads?" she replied with another question.

"Everyone?"

"Ballard just made the most disgusting suggestion to me." She did seem extremely angry.

"Bollard did? Whatever was it?" I asked, delighted.

"He invited me to have the set lunch at the Ludgate Hotel. And as for my so-called husband—" Words failing her, she went to the door. "Goodnight, Rumpole!"

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"Goodnight, Portia."

It was then that I looked down at the letter she'd just written. The envelope was addressed to "The Lord Chancellor, The Lord Chancellor's Office, The House of Lords, London, S.W.I."

A good deal, I thought, was going on under the calm surface of life in our Chambers at Equity Court. I was speculating on the precise nature of such movements with considerable pleasure as I started to walk to the Temple station. On my way I found Miss Fiona Allways waiting for a bus.

"I say," she hailed me. "Any more news about my getting into Chambers?"

"There is a tide in the affairs of women barristers, Fiona," I told her, "which, taken at the flood, leads God knows where."

"What's that mean, exactly?"

"It means that they'll either let you in or they'll throw *me* out." I moved on toward Hilda and home. "Best of luck," I said, "to both of us."

His Honour Judge Leonard Dover was a fairly recent appointment to the collection of Old Bailey judges. He was a youngish man, in his mid-forties perhaps, certainly young enough to be my son, had fate chosen to inflict such a blow. He wore rimless glasses and was a fairly rimless character. He was the sort of judge who has about as many laughs in him as a digital computer, and seemed to have been programmed by the Civil Service. Press all the right buttons—you know the type—and he gives you seven years in the nick. I have often thought that if he were plugged into the mains, Judge Dover could go on passing stiff sentences forever.

On my way into Dover's Court, I had passed Mrs. April Timson, made up to the nines and wearing a sky-blue trouser suit, come to celebrate her husband's day of fame. She accosted me anxiously.

"Tony says you've never let the Timsons down, Mr. Rumpole."

"Mrs. Timson!" I greeted her. "Where's young Vincent today? Otherwise engaged?"

"He's with my friend, Chrissie. She's my neighbor and she's minding him. What are our chances, Mr. Rumpole?"

"Talk to you later," I said, not caring to commit myself.

After the jury had been sworn in, Judge Dover leant toward them and said, in his usual unremarkable monotone, "Nothing that I am going to say now must be taken against the defendant in any way—"

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I stirred in my seat. Whatever was going on, I didn't like the sound of it.

"This is a case in which it seems there is a particular danger of your being approached—by someone," Dover went on, sounding grave. "That often happens in trials of alleged armed robbery by what is known as a 'gang' of serious professional criminals."

It was time to throw a spanner in his programing. "My Lord," I said firmly, and rose to the hind legs, but Dover was locked in conversation with the jury.

"You will be particularly on your guard, and purely for your assistance, of course, you will be kept under police observation." He seemed to notice me at long last. "What is it, Mr. Rumpole? Don't you want this jury to be protected from interference?"

"I don't want the jury to be told this is a case concerning a serious crime before they've heard one word of evidence," I said with all possible vehemence. "I don't want hints that my client belongs to a gang of serious professionals when the truth may be that he's nothing but a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles. I don't want the jury nobbled, but nobbled they have already been, in my respectful submission, by your Lordship's warning."

"Mr. Rumpole! That's an extraordinary suggestion, coming from you!"

"It was made to answer an extraordinary statement coming from your Lordship."

"What is your application, Mr. Rumpole?" Judge Dover asked in a voice several degrees below zero.

"My Lord, I ask that a fresh jury be empaneled, who will have heard no prejudicial suggestions against my client."

"Your application is refused." I had pressed the wrong button and got the automatic printout. There was nothing for it but to sit down, looking extremely hard done by.

"Members of the jury." The Judge turned back to them. "I have already made it perfectly clear to you that nothing I have said contains any suggestion whatever against Mr. Timson. Does that satisfy you, Mr. Rumpole?"

"About as much as a glass of cold carrot juice, old darling," I muttered to Phillida.

"I'm sorry, I didn't hear you, Mr. Rumpole."

"I said, I suppose it will have to, my Lord." I rose in a perfunctory manner.

"Yes, Mr. Rumpole," the Judge said, "I suppose it will . . ."

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Back in the alleged mansion flat, things weren't going too well, either. Hilda, in the course of tidying up, found my old *Oxford Book of English Verse* on a chair (I had been seeking solace in the "Intimations of Immortality" the night before) and she put it on my excellent shelf.

No doubt she thumped it down a fair bit, for my elegant carpentry creaked and then collapsed, casting a good many books and a certain amount of wine to the ground. I have spoken already of the strength of my wife's character. Apparently she went out, purchased a number of rawlplugs and an electric drill, and started a career as a handyman, the full effects of which weren't noticed by me for some time.

In Court, the prosecution was in the hands of Mr. Hilary Onslow, a languid-looking young man whose fair curly hair came sprouting out from under his wig. In spite of his air of well born indifference, he could be, at times, a formidable opponent. One of the earliest witnesses was the supergrass, Gerry Molloy, an overweight character with a red face and glossy black hair who sweated a good deal and seemed about to burst out of his buttons.

"Mr. Molloy. I want to come now to the facts of the Pond Hill bank raid."

"The Pond Hill job. Yes, sir." Gerry sounded only too eager to help.

"How many of you were engaged on that particular enterprise?"

"There was two with sawn-offs. One collector—"

"And you with the sledgehammer?" Onslow asked.

"I was the sledge man, yes. There was five of us altogether."

"Five of you counting the driver?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you *see* the driver?"

"Course I did." The witness sounded very sure of himself. "The driver picked me up at the meet."

"Had you seen him before?"

"Seen him before?" Molloy thought carefully, and then answered, "No, sir."

"Some weeks later did you attend an identification parade?" Onslow turned to me and asked languidly, "Is there any dispute as to whom he picked out at the I.D.?"

"No dispute as to that, no," I granted him.

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"Thank you, Mr. Rumpole." The Judge gave me a faint look of approval.

"Delighted to be of assistance, my Lord," I rose to say, and sank back into my seat as quickly as possible.

"Did you pick out the defendant, Mr. Timson?" Onslow asked.

Tony Timson was staring at the witness from the dock. Gerry Molloy looked away to avoid his accusing eyes and met a glare from April Timson in the public gallery.

"Yes." The answer was a little muted. "I pointed to him. I got no hesitation."

"Thank you, Mr. Molloy."

Hilary Onslow sat and crossed his long legs elegantly. I rose, full of righteous indignation, and looked at the jury in a pained manner as I cast my questions in the general direction of the witness-box.

"Mr. Molloy. You have turned Queen's Evidence in this case?"

"Come again?" The answer was impertinent, so I put my voice up several decibels. "Translated into everyday language, Mr. Molloy, you are a grass. Not even a 'supergrass.' A common or garden ordinary bit of a grass."

There was a welcome stir of laughter from the jury, immediately silenced by the computer on the Bench.

"Members of the jury," Judge Dover reminded them, if they needed reminding, "this is not a place of public entertainment. This witness is giving evidence for the prosecution," he added, as though that covered the matter.

"You're giving evidence for the prosecution because you were caught." I turned to the witness-box then. "Not being a particularly efficient sledge, you tripped over your holdall in the street and missed the getaway car. You were apprehended, Mr. Molloy, in the gutter!"

"They nicked me, yes," Molloy admitted.

"And you have already been sentenced to two years for your part in the robbery?"

"I got a two, yes."

"A considerable reduction because you agreed with the police to grass on your colleagues," I suggested.

"I got under the odds, yes," he agreed, less readily.

"Considerably under the odds, Mr. Molloy, and for that you were prepared to betray your own family?"

"Come again?"

"Three of your colleagues were members of the clan Molloy."

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"They were Molloys, yes."

"And only one Timson?"

"Yes."

"And as the Montagues to the Capulets, I put it to you, so are the Timsons to the Molloys."

"Did you say the 'Montagues,' Mr. Rumpole?" The Judge seemed puzzled by a name he hadn't heard in the case before, so my literary reference was lost on the computer.

"I simply meant that the Molloys hate and despise the Timsons. Isn't that so, Mr. Gerry Molloy?" I asked the witness.

"We never got on, no. It's traditional. Although—"

"Although what?"

"I believe my cousin Shawn's wife what he's separated from lives quite close to Tony Timson and his wife and—"

I interrupted a speech which I thought might somehow blur the picture I had just painted. "Apart from that, it's true, isn't it, that the Molloys are in a different league from the Timsons?"

"What league is that, Mr. Rumpole?" Judge Dover looked puzzled.

"The big league, my Lord." I helped him understand. "You and your relations, according to your evidence, did the Barclays Bank in Penge, the Midland, Croydon, and the NatWest in Barking—" I was back with the witness.

"That's what I've said." He was sweating more now, and two of his lower shirt buttons had gone off about their own affairs.

"Spreading your favors evenly round the money market. Have you ever known a Timson to be present at a bank robbery before, Mr. Molloy?"

"Not as I can remember. But my brother Charlie was off sick and we was short of a driver."

"Perhaps you were. Unhappily, all your Molloy colleagues seem to have vanished."

At which point my learned friend, Mr. Hilary Onslow, felt it right to unwind his legs and draw himself to his great height. "My Lord," he said, "I explained to the jury that determined efforts to trace the other participants in this robbery are still being made by the police."

"If my learned friend wishes to give evidence, perhaps your Lordship would like him to go into the witness-box," I said, and got the automatic judicial rebuke: "Mr. Rumpole, that comment was quite uncalled-for."

"Steady on, Rumpole. Don't tease him," Phillida whispered a bit of sound advice. So I said, with deep humility, "So it was, my Lord.

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I entirely agree." I turned back, with no humility at all, to Gerry Molloy. "With your relations all gone to ground you had to have a victim, didn't you, to justify your privileged treatment as a grass?" The jury, who looked extremely interested, clearly saw the point. The witness pretended that he didn't.

"A victim?" He was playing for time, I gave him none.

"So you decided to pick one out of the despised Timsons and put him in the frame."

"Put him in the *what,* Mr. Rumpole?" The Judge affected not to understand. I hadn't time to teach him plain English.

"Put him in the driver's seat, where he certainly never was," I suggested to the supergrass.

"He was there. I told you." Gerry Molloy was growing indignant.

"Where did you meet?"

"One of the Molloy houses," he said, after a pause.

"Which one?"

"I think it was Michael's. Or Vic's. I can't be sure."

"Can't you?"

"It was Shawn's," he decided.

"And having decided to frame Tony," I went on quickly, "was it some member of the Molloy family who planted a packet of stolen banknotes in the Timson home?"

"It couldn't have been him, could it, Mr. Rumpole?" The Judge was looking back in his notes. "This witness has been in custody ever since—"

"Since the robbery, yes, my Lord," I agreed, and then asked Molloy, "Did you receive visits in prison before you made your statement?"

"A few visits, yes."

"From your wife?"

"One or two."

"And was it through her that the word was sent out to plant the money on Tony Timson?"

I made the suggestion for the benefit of the jury, but it deeply shocked Gerald Supergrass Molloy. "I wouldn't ask my wife to do them sort of messages," he said, deeply pained.

Back at home, Hilda, swathed in an overall, was drilling the wall to receive a new consignment of Easy-Do shelving in a completely professional manner. I was also plugging away in Court, asking a few pertinent questions of Detective Inspector Broome, the officer in charge of the case.

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"Gerry Molloy made his statement two days after the robbery, at about two-thirty in the afternoon?" I suggested.

"Two-thirty-five, to be precise," the D.I. put me right.

"Oh, please. I'm sure my Lord would like you to be very precise. You went straight round to Tony Timson's house?"

"We did."

"In a police car, with the siren blaring?"

"I think we had the siren on for some of the time. We were in a hurry."

"And you were lucky enough to find him at home?"

"Well, he wasn't out doing window-cleaning, sir."

There was a small titter from the jury. I interrupted it as soon as possible.

"My client opened the door to you at once?"

"Soon as we knocked. Yes."

"No sort of interval while he tried to move the money to a more sensible hiding place, for instance?"

"Perhaps he was happy with it where it was."

Before he got another laugh, I came in quickly with, "Or perhaps, Inspector, he had no idea that the money had been put there."

"I don't know about that."

"Don't you? One last matter. Was it Gerry Molloy who told you that Tony Timson was a dangerous member of a big-time robbery firm who might try and nobble the jury?"

"Molloy told us that, yes." Inspector Broome was a little reluctant to answer.

"So a solemn warning was given by the learned Judge on the word of a self-confessed sledgehammer man who has already been convicted of malicious wounding, robbery, and grievous bodily harm."

"Yes." The short answer came even more reluctantly from the Inspector.

"And doesn't that solemn warning give a quite unfair impression of Tony Timson?"

"Unfair, sir?" Broome did his best to look puzzled.

"You'd never put Tony Timson in for the serious-crime award, would you? He's a small-time thief who specializes in relieving householders of their home entertainment, video machines, teas-mades, and the like."

"That would seem to be so, yes," the Inspector admitted.

"So if I said to you that this robbery was quite out of Tony Timson's league, how would you translate that suggestion?"

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"I would say it's out of his character, sir. Judging by past form." So I sat down with some heartfelt thanks to Detective Inspector Broome.

At the end of the day I went with Phillida and Bernard to visit our client in the cells. He appeared pleased with our progress, but I hadn't yet an answer to what seemed to me the single important question in the case.

"The money in the washing machine, Tony," I asked him. "It must have been put there by someone. Does April go out much?"

"She takes young Vince round her friend's."

"Her friend Chrissie?" The question seemed important to me, but Tony answered vaguely, "I think that's her name. I don't know the woman."

"Money found in the kitchen," I said thoughtfully. "I don't suppose you do much cooking, do you, Tony?"

"Oh, leave it out, Mr. Rumpole!" Tony found the suggestion highly diverting.

"Never wash up?"

"Course I don't!" He could hardly suppress his laughter. "That's April's job, innit?"

"I suppose it's only barristers who spend the evenings up to their wrists in the Fairy Liquid. Yes, and of course you don't run young Vince's smalls through the washing machine?"

"Now would I be expected to do a job like that?" He looked to Mrs. Erskine-Brown for support. "Would I?"

"You mean it would be a bit like having a woman defend you?" Phillida asked in a pointed sort of way. Tony Timson had the grace to look apologetic.

"I never meant nothing personal," he said. "It just doesn't seem natural."

"Really." Phillida was unappeased. "As a matter of fact, my husband is quite a good performer on the spin-drier."

"Poor bloke!" Tony was laughing again.

I interrupted the badinage. "Let's take it that you leave such matters to April. When does she do the washing, Tony? On a Monday?"

"Suppose so." He didn't sound particularly interested.

"The bank raid was on Monday. Gerry Molloy made his statement on Wednesday afternoon and the police were round at once. Whoever put it there didn't have much time."

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"I don't know," and he added hopelessly, "I just never go near the bleeding washing machine."

I gathered up my brief and prepared to return to the free world.

"See you tomorrow, Tony," I said. "Come on, Portia. I think we've got what we wanted."

When I left the Old Bailey that evening and stepped off the pavement, a small white sportscar, driven with great speed and expertise, flashed past me, almost cutting me off somewhere past my prime, and, passing two or three slowly moving taxis on the inside, zipped off and was lost in traffic. I caught sight of a blonde head behind the wheel and deduced that the driver was none other than that devoted housewife, Mrs. April Timson.

I didn't sleep much that night. I was busy putting two and two together to make about five thousand nicker. Around dawn I drifted off and dreamt of washing machines and spin-driers, and Ballard was bringing me a bouquet of roses and inviting me to lunch, and Fiona Allways had decided to leave the Bar and take up life as a coal miner, saying the pay was so much better.

So I arrived at the Old Bailey in a somewhat jaded condition. Having robed for the day's work, I went up to the canteen on the third floor and bought myself a black coffee and a slightly flaccid sausage roll. I wasn't enjoying them much when Erskine-Brown came up to me in a state of considerable distress, holding out a copy of *The Times* in a trembling hand. The poor fellow looked decidedly seedy.

"The silk list, Rumpole!" he stammered. "Have you seen the new Q.C.s?"

"Haven't got beyond the crossword." I opened the paper and found the relevant page. "Well, here's your name. What are you worrying about?"

"*My* name?" Erskine-Brown asked bitterly.

"Erskine-Brown. *Mrs.!*" I read the entry more carefully. "Oh, I do see." I felt for the man, my heart bled for him.

"She never warned me, Rumpole! I had no idea she'd applied. Had you?"

"No." I honestly hadn't. "Haven't you asked her about it?"

"She left home before the paper came. And now she's gone to ground in the ladies' robing room!" Then he asked with a faint hope, "Do you think it might be some sort of misprint?"

I might have sat there for some time commiserating with Claude,

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but I saw a blonde head and a blue trouser suit by the tea-urns. I rose, excused myself to the still suffering, still junior barrister, and arrived alongside Mrs. April Timson just in time to pay for her coffee.

"You're very kind, Mr. Rumpole," she said.

"Sometimes," I agreed. She moved to a table. I went with her. "Young Vincent well this morning, is he? Chrissie Molloy looking after him properly?"

"Chrissie's all right." She sat and then looked up at me and spoke very quietly. "Tony doesn't know she's a Molloy."

I sat down beside her and took my time in lighting a small cigar. "No, Mrs. Timson," I said. "Tony doesn't know very much, does he?"

"We were at school together. Me and Chrissie. Anyway, she and Shawn Molloy's separated."

"But still friends," I suggested. "Close enough for the Molloy firm to meet at Chrissie's house." I blew out smoke and then asked, "When did you know they were short of a driver?"

"I may have heard—someone mention it." She looked away from me and stirred her coffee. So I told her the whole story, as though she didn't know. "Your husband wouldn't have been the slightest use in a getaway car, would he?" I said. "He'd have had three parking tickets and hit a milk float before they'd got clear of the bank. You, on the other hand, I happen to have noticed, are distinctively nippy driving through traffic." A silence fell between us. It lasted until I said, "What was the matter? Tony not ambitious enough for you?"

"Why ever should you think—?" She looked up at me then. Whatever it was meant to be, the look was not innocent.

"Because of where you put the money," I told her quietly. "It was the one place in the house you knew your husband would never look."

She had the nerve of an accomplished villain, had Mrs. April Timson. She took a long swig of coffee and then she asked me what I was going to do.

"The real question is," I said, "what are *you* going to do?" And then I gave her my legal advice. "Leave it out, April," I said. "Give it up, Mrs. Timson. Keep away from it. It's men's work, you know. Let the men make a mess of it." I paused to let the advice sink in, then I stood up to go. "It was the first time, I imagine. Better make it the last."

I got into Court some time before the learned computer took his

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seat on the Bench. As soon as Phillida arrived, I gave her, believing it right to take my junior into my full confidence, my solution to the case, and an account of my conversation with April Timson.

She thought for a moment, and then asked, "But why didn't Gerry Molloy identify *her?*"

"He was ashamed, don't you understand? He didn't want to admit that the great Molloys went out with a *woman* driver!"

"What on earth are we going to do?"

"We can't prove it was April. Let's hope they can't prove it was Tony. The jury don't much care for the mini-grass, and the Molloys *might* have planted the money."

Hilary Onslow came in then, gave us a cheerful "Good morning," and took his place. I spoke to Phillida in a whisper.

"Only one thing we can do, Portia. I'll just give them the speech about reasonable doubt."

"No. *I* will," she said firmly.

"What?" I wasn't following her drift.

"I'm *your* leader now. Don't you read *The Times,* Rumpole? I have taken silk!"

At which point the usher shouted, "Be upstanding," and Judge Dover was upon us. He looked at the defense team, said, "Yes, Mr. Rumpole?" and then saw that Phillida was on her feet.

"Mrs. Erskine-Brown. I believe that certain congratulations are in order?"

"Yes, my Lord, I believe they are," said our Portia, and announced that she would now call the defendant.

Tony gave evidence. As he denied knowing anything about the money, or the whereabouts of the Pond Hill bank, or even the exact situation of his own washing machine, he was a difficult witness to cross-examine. Onslow did his best, and made a moderately effective final speech, and then I sat quietly and listened to Mrs. Phillida Erskine-Brown, now my learned leader. I smiled as I heard her reach a familiar peroration.

"Members of the jury." She was addressing them with carefully controlled emotion. "Soon this case will be over. In a little while you will go back to your jobs and your families, and you will forget about it. At most it is only a small part of your lives, but for my client, Tony Timson, it is the *whole* of his life! And it is that life I leave with confidence in your hands, certain that there can be only one verdict in this case, 'Not Guilty'!"

And then Phillida sank down in her seat exhausted, just as I had

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taught her to, as I had taught Fiona Allways, and anyone else who would care to listen.

"Good speech," I congratulated Phillida as we came out of Court when the Timson case was over.

"Yes. It always was."

"Portia of Belmont—Phillida Erskine-Brown, nee Trant—and Fiona Allways. The great tradition of female advocates should be carried on!" I lit a small cigar.

Phillida looked at me. "It's not enough for you that we won Timson, is it? Not enough that you got the jury to disbelieve Gerry Molloy and think the money may have been planted. You want to win the Allways case as well."

"Well," I said reasonably, "why shouldn't we take on Fiona?"

"Over my dead body!"

She moved toward the lifts. I followed her.

"But *why?*"

"She was making a play for Claude. I found them all over each other in Pommeroy's. That's when I got so angry I applied for silk."

"Without telling your husband?" I asked sorrowfully.

"I'm afraid so."

"I'd better come clean about this." I took off my wig and stood looking at her. She looked back at me, deeply suspicious. "What've you been up to, Rumpole?"

"Well, I just wanted your Claude to look on Miss Allways with a warm and friendly eye. I mean, I thought that'd increase her chances of getting in, so—"

"You wanted Claude to *warm* to her—?" Phillida's voice was rising to a note of outrage.

"I thought it might help, yes," I admitted.

"Rumpole! I suppose you told him that she fancied him."

"Now, Portia. Would I do such a thing?" I protested.

"Very probably. If you wanted to win badly enough. I imagine you told him she thought he looked like Robert Redford."

"No. I protest!" I was hurt. "That is utterly and entirely untrue! I told him she thought he looked like a fellow called Newman."

"And had Allways actually said that?" Phillida was still uncertain of the facts.

"Well, if you want me to be entirely honest—"

"It would make a change," she said.

"Well, no, she hadn't."

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And then, quite unexpectedly, our Portia smiled. "Poor old Claude," she said. "You know what you were doing, Rumpole? You can't rely on a girl to get in on her own talents, can you? You have to manipulate and rely on everyone else's vanity. You were simply exploiting the male sex."

"So now you know," I asked her, "will you vote for Fiona?"

"Tell me one good reason."

"Ballard's against her."

"I suppose that's one good reason. And because of you I've ended up a silk. What on earth can I tell Claude?" She seemed, for a delightful moment, overcome with guilt and blushed very prettily, as though she had to admit the existence of a lover.

"Tell him," I suggested, "that the Lord Chancellor just thought there weren't enough women silks. So that's why you got it. He'll feel better if he thinks there's no damn merit about this thing."

"I suppose so." She looked a little disappointed as she asked me, "Is that true?"

"Quite possibly," I told her. After all, I hadn't undertaken to tell her the *whole* truth about anything.

When I got home that night, Hilda asked me if I had noticed anything. Suspecting that she had had a new hairdo or bought a new dress, I said that of course she was looking extremely pretty.

"Not me," she said. "Look at the walls."

The shelf I had put up was not only firmly screwed and looking even better than usual, it seemed to have pupped and there were shelves all over the place, gamely supporting potted plants and glasses, telephone directories and bottles of plonk.

"What did you do, Hilda?" I asked her. "Did you get a man in?"

"Yes," she said. "Me."

It all ended once again with a Chambers party. The excuse for that particular shindig was the swearing-in at the House of Lords of Mrs. Phillida Erskine-Brown as One of Her Majesty's Counsel. She made a resplendent figure as she came to split a few bottles of champagne with us in Ballard's room. Her handsome female face peeped out between the long spaniel's ears of her full-bottomed wig. She wore a long silk gown with a black purse on her back. There were lace cuffs on her tailed coat, and lace at her throat. Her black skirt ended with black stockings and diamond-buckled shoes. She carried her white gloves in one hand and a glass of Mercier (on offer at Pommeroy's) in the other. Just when matters were going with a

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certain amount of swing, Ballard took it upon himself to make a speech. "In our great profession," he was saying, "we are sometimes accused of prejudice against the female sex."

"Shame!" said Erskine-Brown.

"That may be true of some sets of Chambers, but it cannot be said of us at 3 Equity Court," Ballard continued. "As in many other things, we take the lead and set the example! Today we celebrate the well deserved promotion of Mrs. Phillida Erskine-Brown to the front row!"

"Philly looks very fine in a silk gown, doesn't she, Rumpole?" the proud husband said to me.

"Gorgeous!" I agreed.

"And we welcome a new member of our set, young Fiona Allways," Ballard concluded. All around me barristers were toasting the triumph of women.

"You know, between ourselves, Philly got it because it's the Lord Chancellor's policy to appoint more *women* Q.C.s," Erskine-Brown told me confidentially.

"How appalling." I looked on the man with considerable sympathy. "You're a victim of sexual discrimination!"

"But Philly's made me a promise. Next year she's going to take some time off."

"Good. I might get my work back."

"We're going to have—" his voice sank confidentially "—a little companion for Tristan."

"Isolde?" I suggested.

"Oh, really, Rumpole!"

I moved away from him as I saw Phillida in all her glory go up to Fiona, who was wearing wide trousers which, coming to just below the knees, had the appearance of a widish split skirt.

"Well done, Allways!" Phillida gave the girl an encouraging smile. "Welcome to Chambers."

"Thank you, Mrs. Erskine-Brown." Fiona seemed genuinely pleased. But Phillida had stopped smiling.

"Oh, just one thing, Allways. No culottes!"

"Oh," said Fiona. "Really?"

"If you want to get on at the Bar, and it is a pretty tough profession," Phillida told her, "just don't go in for those sort of baggy trouser arrangements. It's just not on."

"No. Remember that, Fiona," I put my oar in. "A fellow looks so much better in a skirt."

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ON OUR COVER

The versatile Peter Falk—on our cover as Columbo—was born on September 16, 1927. After earning a B.A. from the New School of Social Research and an M.B.A. from Syracuse University, he became an efficiency expert for the Budget Bureau of the State of Connecticut. Bored with adding figures, he became interested in amateur dramatics and in 1955 he turned professional, first gaining attention in an Off Broadway production of Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh.* He has won Emmys for his portrayals of a truck driver in a TV play, *Price of Tomatoes,* and as Columbo. He received Oscar nominations as best supporting actor for his work in *Murder Inc.* and *Pocketful of Miracles.* In 1962 he won a Tony for his starring performance in Neil Simon's *The Prisoner of Second Avenue.*

Of the character of Columbo, created by Richard Levinson and William Link,* Richard Levinson said in an interview in *American Film:* "Columbo first appeared on the *Chevrolet Mystery Show.* We derived the character basically from Petrovich in *Crime and Punishment,* who was always clawing away at the student who killed the landlady. He was already very unassuming; we added the raincoat and cigar. That, along with G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown, is the genesis of Columbo. About a year later, we turned it into a play that toured with Thomas Mitchell as Columbo . . . In 1967, when we heard that Universal was making movies for television, we sent over the stock-theater version and they liked it."

"It's been more than ten years since the last new episode ran," Peter Falk told *TV Guide* in February when the series was revived for ABC's *Mystery Movie* anthology series."He's gonna be just the same as always. He's absorbed in his job. He's just as curious. He doesn't need to shoot anybody to solve a crime. Deductive reasoning works just fine . . . His dog will get a little older, his car will get a little older. His raincoat will get a little older . . . Columbo in 1989 is not thinking of giving up cigars. He's just thinking, Gee, it's getting harder and harder to bum a match."

*In May of this year, Richard Levinson (who died in 1987) and William Link received the Ellery Queen Award from the Mystery Writers of America for their excellence in collaborative writing. Their first professionally published fiction appeared in *EQMM's* Department of First Stories in 1954.

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AD SPECIALTY SALES OPENINGS. 80 Years in the Advertising Specialty and Calendar Industry have taught us the best Salespeople are Self-Starters who prefer the independence of straight commission sales over someone else calling the shots. NEWTON MFG. CO. offers that person the BEST Home Office Support in the industry! Ask around! Weekly Commissions, 24 Hour Toll-Free Message Center, a Generous Cash Bonus and the Top Sample Program in the Business. All orders Acknowledged. Shipping Notices provided and MUCH MORE! No Investment, No Collections. Full or Part-Time. You're your own Boss. Contact Kevin Peska, NEWTON MFG. CO., Dept. HIOC8, Newton, Iowa 50208.

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ELLERY QUEEN

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

Send to **ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE**
Classified Advertising Department Suite 1401
380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

15 WORD MINIMUM
Only $48.00 for 15 Words or Less
$3.20 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME _____

FIRM (NAME IN AD) _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ **STATE** _____ **ZIP** _____

PHONE: _____ **DATE:** _____

YOUR SIGNATURE _____

_____ Words at $3.20 each $ .....

_____ Capitalized word at .40¢ each _____
Total amount for 1 ad $

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 = $ _____
(b) Multiply total amount on above line by x .85
(c) Total amount for 3 ads $

(Example: One 15 word ad $48.00 x 3 months – $144.00 x .85 – $122.40)

$_____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(1) **$48.00**	(2) **$48.00**	(3) **$48.00**	(4) **$48.00**	(5) **$48.00**
(6) **$48.00**	(7) **$48.00**	(8) **$48.00**	(9) **$48.00**	(10) **$48.00**
(11) **$48.00**	(12) **$48.00**	(13) **$48.00**	(14) **$48.00**	(15) **$48.00**
(16) **$51.20**	(17) **$54.40**	(18) **$57.60**	(19) **$60.80**	(20) **$64.00**
(21) **$67.20**	(22) **$70.40**	(23) **$73.60**	(24) **$76.80**	(25) **$80.00**
(26) **$83.20**	(27) **$86.40**	(28) **$89.60**	(29) **$92.80**	(30) **$96.00**

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad Each initial or number counts as 1 word Mark Holly, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017 7 WORDS Zip codes are not counted Phone # 2 Words Symbols used as keys are charged for City or State count as 1 word each Garden City, New York 2 words. Abbreviations such as C O D . F O B . P O . U S A. 7x10. 35mm count as 1 word (PO Box 145 count as 3 words) Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling, compound words, hyphens, abbreviations, etc **Please make checks payable to ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE.**

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***7 NEW* stories—including**

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ISAAC ASIMOV (about the Black Widowers)

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Captain Leopold)

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POSTMASTER: Send Change of Address to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 7052, Red Oak, IA 51591. In Canada return to 1801 South Cameron, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3E1. ISSN: 0013-6328. For back issues, send $3.50 to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 40, Vernon, NJ 07462.

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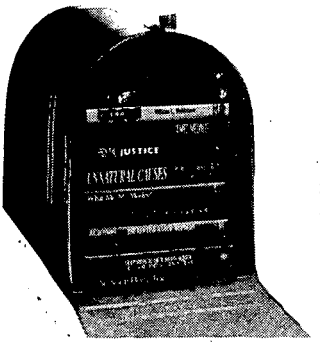

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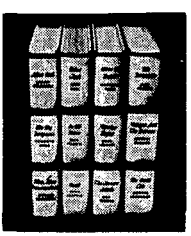

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89-FV
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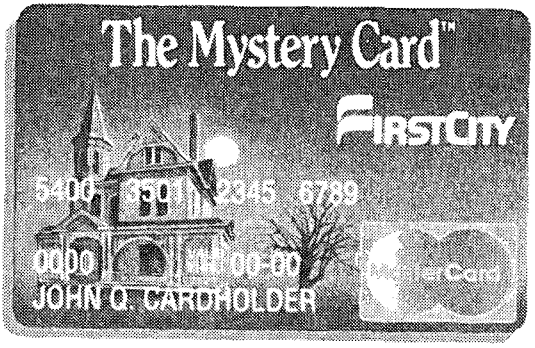

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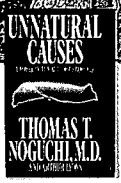

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